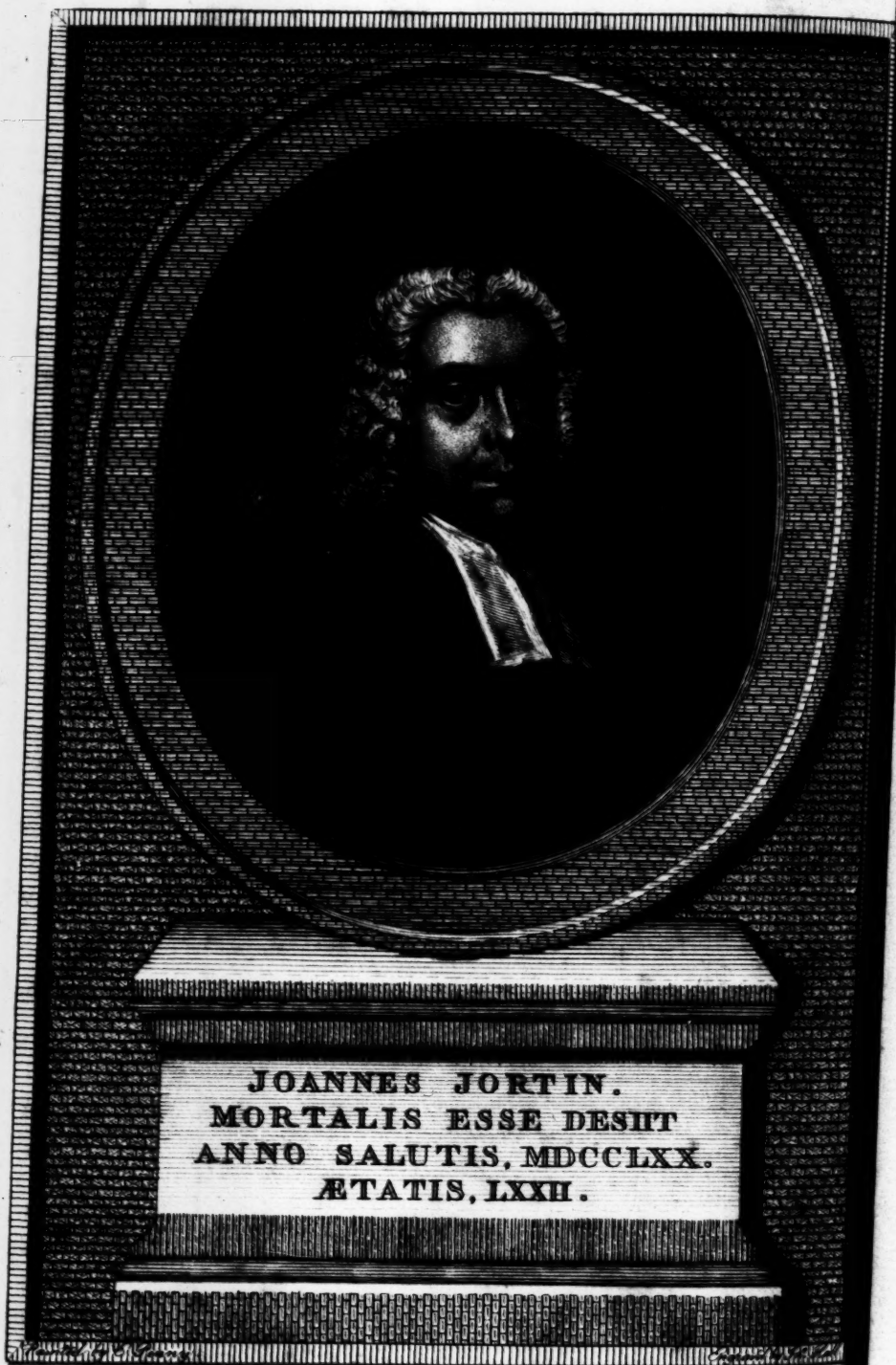
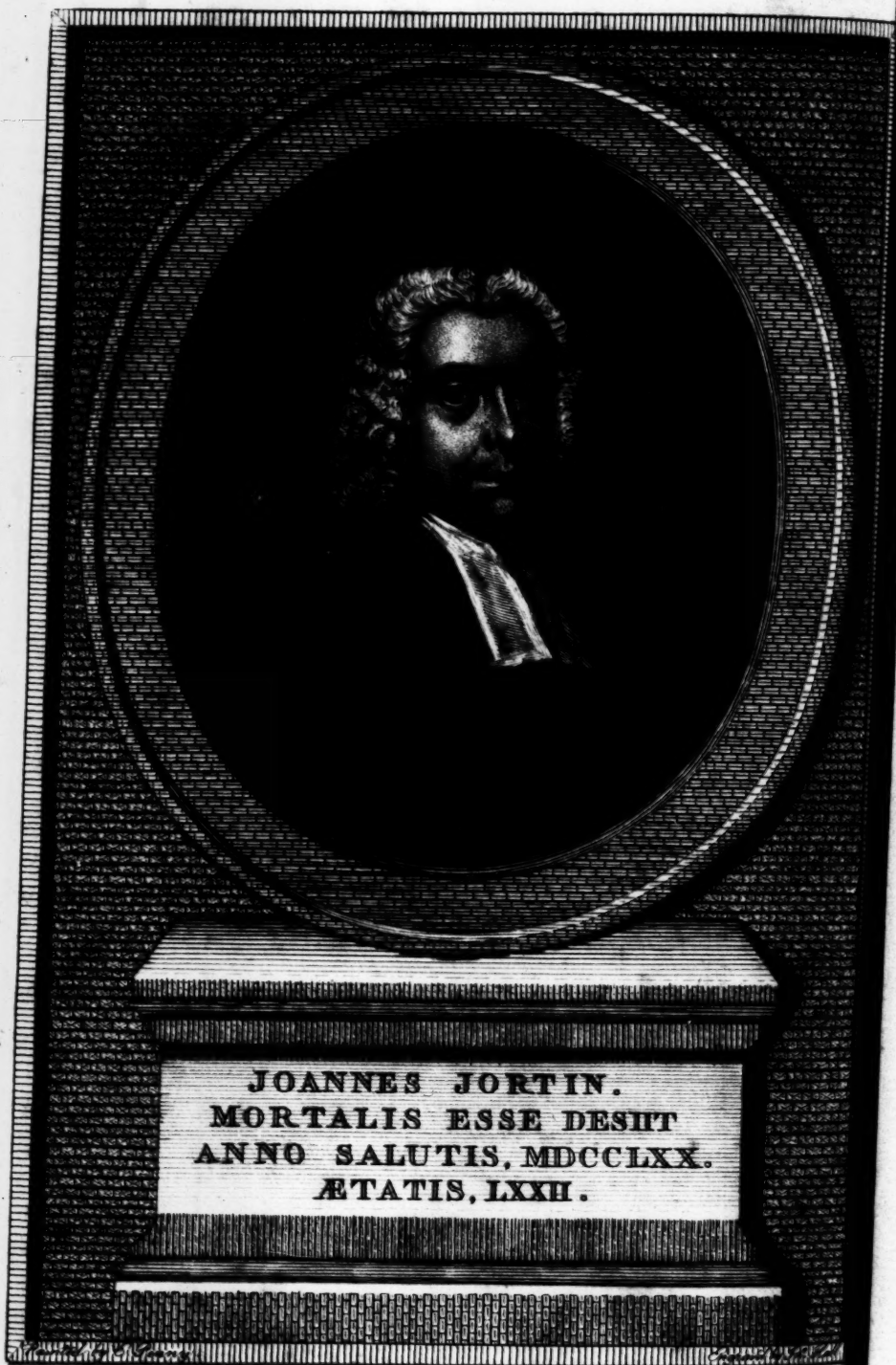




**JOANNES JORTIN.
MORTALIS ESSE DESIIT
ANNO SALUTIS, MDCCLXX.
ÆTATIS, LXXH.**



**JOANNES JORTIN.
MORTALIS ESSE DESIIT
ANNO SALUTIS, MDCCLXX.
ÆTATIS, LXXII.**

S E R M O N S

O N

DIFFERENT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND

J O H N J O R T I N, D. D.

—*K*

ARCHDEACON OF LONDON, RECTOR OF ST. DUNSTAN IN
THE EAST, AND VICAR OF KENSINGTON.

THE THIRD EDITION, CORRECTED.

WITH A PRINT OF THE AUTHOR, AND AN ACCOUNT OF
HIS WRITINGS.

V O L U M E I

L O N D O N:

Printed for BENJAMIN WHITE, and SON,
at HORACE's Head, Fleet-Street.

MDCCLXXXVII.

S E R M O N S

OF THE REV. J. H. BURTON

JOHN BURTON



TO
THE PARISHIONERS
OF
ST. DUNSTAN IN THE EAST,
AND OF
KENSINGTON,
THESE SERMONS
OF HIS FATHER,
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
ARE INSCRIBED,
AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT,
BY
ROGERS JORTIN.

Lincoln's-Inn,
January 1, 1771.

THE PARISHIONERS

OF ST. GEORGE'S IN THE EAST

AND OF

KENSINGTON

THESE SERMONS

OF HIS LATHER

PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST

ARE INSCRIBED

AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT

BY

WILLIAM LUTHER

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C O N T E N T S.

S E R M O N I.

The Sin of misleading the Blind.

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SERMON

AN
A C C O U N T
OF THE
L I F E A N D W R I T I N G S
OF
D R. J O R T I N.

DR. JORTIN was born in London, the 23d of October 1698. His father Renatus, who was of Bretagne in France, came over to England about 1685, when Protestantism was no longer tolerated in that country ; was made a gentleman of the Privy Chamber in 1691 ; became afterwards secretary to Lord Orford, Sir George Rooke, and Sir Cloudefly Shovel ; and was cast away with the last, the

22d of October 1707. His mother was Martha Rogers, of an ancient and respectable family in Bucks, which had produced some clergymen distinguished by their abilities and learning. He was trained at the Charter-House school, where he made a good proficiency in Greek and Latin: his French he learned at home, and understood and spake that language well.

In May 1715 he was admitted of Jesus College in Cambridge; and about two years after, recommended by his tutor Dr. Styan Thirlby, who was very fond of him, and always retained a friendship for him, to make extracts from Eustathius for the use of Pope's Homer. He was not directly employed by Pope; nor did it ever happen to him to see the face of that poet; for, being of a shy, modest nature, he felt no impulse to force his way to him; nor did the other make inquiry about him, though perfectly satisfied with what he had done for him.

He

He took a Bachelor of Arts degree in January 1718-19, and a Master's in 1722 : he had been chosen Fellow of his college soon after the taking of his first degree. This year he distinguished himself by the publication of a few Latin poems, entitled, *Lulus Poetici*, which were well received. September 1723, he entered into Deacon's orders, and into Priest's the June following. January 1726-7, he was presented by his college to Swavesey, near Cambridge ; but marrying a daughter of Mr. Chibnall, of Newport-Pagnell, Bucks, in 1728, he resigned that living, and soon after settled himself in London.

In this town he spent the next two-and-thirty years of his life ; for, though the Earl of Winchelsea gave him the living of Eastwell in Kent, where he resided a little time ; yet he very soon quitted it, and returned to London. Here for many years he had employment as a preacher in several chapels ; with

the emoluments of which, and a decent competency of his own, he supported himself and his family in a respectable though private manner, dividing his leisure hours between his books and his friends, especially those of the *Literati*, with whom he always kept up a close and intimate connection.

In 1730 he published *Four Sermons on the Truth of the Christian Religion*; the substance of which was afterwards incorporated in a work of his, intitled, *Discourses concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion*; printed in 1746, in octavo.

In 1731 he published *Miscellaneous Observations upon Authors Ancient and Modern*, in two volumes, octavo. This is a collection of critical remarks, of which however he was not the sole, though principal, author; Pearce, Mason, and others, were contributors to it. In 1751, Archbishop Herring gave him, unasked, the living of St. Dunstan in the East, London.

London. This prelate, with whom he had been long acquainted, had entertained an high and affectionate regard for him ; had endeavoured aforetime to serve him in many instances, with others ; and afterwards, in 1755, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. This same year, 1751, came out his first volume of *Remarks upon Ecclesiastical History*, octavo. This work was inscribed to the Earl of Burlington, by whom, as Trustee for the Boylean Lecture, he had, through the application of Archbishop Herring and Bishop Sherlock, been appointed in 1749 to preach that Lecture. There is a preface to this volume, of more than 40 pages, an admirable one indeed ; for, besides much learning and ingenuity displayed throughout, it is full of the spirit of liberty and candour. These *Remarks upon Ecclesiastical History* were continued, in four succeeding volumes, down to the year 1517, when Luther began the work of Reformation : two published by

himself, in 1752 and 1754; and two after his death, in 1773.

In 1755 he published *Six Dissertations upon different Subjects*, in octavo. The Sixth Dissertation is on the State of the Dead, as described by Homer and Virgil; and the remarks in this, tending to establish the great antiquity of the doctrine of a future state, interfered with Dr. Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, and drew upon him a very severe attack from that quarter. He made no reply; but in his *Adversaria* the following memorandum is found, which shews that he did not oppose the notions of other men, from any spirit of envy or opposition, but from a full persuasion that the real matter of fact was as he had represented it. “ *I have examined,*” says he, “ the State of the Dead as described by Homer and Virgil, and upon that Dissertation I am willing to stake all the little credit that I have as a critic and a philologer. I have there observed,
“ that

" that Homer was not the inventor of the fa-
 " bulous histories of the gods : he had those
 " stories, and also the doctrine of a future
 " state, from old traditions. Many notions
 " of the Pagans, which came from tradition,
 " are considered by Barrow, Serm. VIII.
 " Vol. II. in which sermon the existence of
 " God is proved from universal consent. See
 " also Bibl. Choif. I. 356. and Bibl. Univ. IV.
 " 433."

In 1758 came out his *Life of Erasmus*, in
 one volume, quarto; and in 1760, another
 volume, quarto, containing *Remarks upon the*
Works of Erasmus, and an *Appendix of Extracts*
from Erasmus, and other Writers. In the Pre-
 face to the former volume, he says, that " Le
 " Clerc, while he published the works of
 " Erasmus at Leyden, drew up his Life in
 " French, collected principally from his Let-
 " ters, and inserted it into the Bibliotheque
 " Choisee; that as this Life was favourably re-
 " ceived by the public, he had taken it as a

“ground-work to build upon; and had
 “translated it, not superstitiously and close-
 “ly, but with much freedom, and with
 “more attention to things than to words;
 “but that he had made continual additions,
 “not only with relation to the history of
 “those days, but to the Life of *Erasmus*;
 “especially where Le Clerc grew more re-
 “miss, either wearied with the task, or
 “called off from these to other labours.”
 After mentioning a few other matters to
 his *Readers*, he turns his discourse to his
Friends; “recommending himself to their
 “favour, whilst he is with them, and his
 “name, when he is gone hence; and in-
 “treating them in a wish, that he may pass
 “the evening of a studious and unambitious
 “life in an humble but not a slothful obscu-
 “rity; and never forfeit the kind continu-
 “ance of their accustomed approbation.”

But whatever he or his friends might
 wish, he was to live hereafter neither so
 studiously

studiously, nor so obscurely, as his imagination had figured out to him: more public scenes, than any he had yet been engaged in, still awaited him. For Dr. Hayter, Bishop of London, with whom, by the way, he had always been upon intimate terms, dying in 1762; and Dr. Osbaldeston, who was also his friend, succeeding to that see; he was made domestic chaplain to this bishop in March, admitted into a Prebend of St. Paul's the same month, and in October presented to the living of Kensington, whither he went to reside soon after.

In 1764, he was appointed Archdeacon of London, and might have had the Rectory of St. James, Westminster; but chose rather to continue at Kensington, that being a situation he much liked, and better adapted to his then advanced age. Here he lived, occupied (when his pastoral functions permitted) amongst his books, and enjoying himself with his usual serenity, till the 27th of August

1770,

1770, when, being seized with a disorder in his breast and lungs, he grew continually worse, notwithstanding all assistance; and, without undergoing much pain in the course of his illness, or losing his understanding in the least, died the 5th of September, in the 72d year of his age. He was buried in the new church-yard at Kensington, as he had directed; and had a flat stone laid over him, with this Inscription, dictated by himself:

JOANNES JORTIN

Mortalis esse desiit

Anno Salutis 1770,

Ætatis 72.

He left a widow and two children: Rogers Jortin, of Lincoln's-Inn, in the profession of the law; and Martha, married to the Rev. Samuel Darby, late Fellow of Jesus College in Cambridge, and now Rector of Whatfield in Suffolk.

Besides

Besides his principal works, which have already been mentioned, and these Sermons and Charges, there are some things of a smaller kind: as *Remarks upon Spencer's Poems*, 1734, octavo, at the end of which are some Remarks upon *Milton*; Remarks on *L. Annæus Seneca*, printed in *The Present State of the Republic of Letters*, for August 1734; a *Sermon* preached at the Consecration of Pearce, Bishop of Bangor, in 1747; a few *Remarks on Tillotson's Sermons*, given to his friend Dr. Birch, and printed in the Appendix to Birch's Life of that Prelate, in 1752; *Letter to Avison, concerning the Music of the Ancients*, subjoined to a second edition of *Avison's Essay on Musical Expression*, in 1753; and a few Remarks on *Phillips's Life of Cardinal Pole*, printed in an Appendix to *Neve's Animadversions* upon that history, 1766.

Besides great integrity, great humanity, and other qualities which make men amiable as well as useful, this learned and excellent person

person was of a very pleasant and facetious turn, as his writings abundantly shew. He had nevertheless great sensibility, and could express himself with warmth, and even some degree of indignation, when he thought the occasion warranted him so to do. For instance, he had a great respect and fondness for critical learning, which he so much cultivated; and though he knew and allowed it to have been disgraced by the manners of certain proud, fastidious and insolent critics, such as Scaliger, Salmasius, Scioppius, &c. yet he thought the restoration of letters, and the civilization of Europe, so much indebted to it, that he could ill bear to see it contemptuously treated; and to this may be imputed the little satirical strokes which sometimes occur in his works, against those that did so contemptuously treat it,

For the Motto of his *Life of Erasmus*, he chose some words of Erasmus himself: *Illud certe præfagio, de meis lucubrationibus, quales-*

cunque sunt, candidius judicaturam posteritatem, tametsi nec de meo seculo queri possum. Yet it is certain that he had very slight notions of posthumous fame or glory, and of any real good which could arise from it; as appears from what he had collected and written about it in a note on Milton, at the end of his Remarks upon Spencer. He could sometimes complain, and doubtless with good reason, of the low estimation into which learning was fallen; and thought it discountenanced and discouraged, indirectly at least, when ignorant and worthless persons were advanced to high stations and great preferments, while men of merit and abilities were overlooked and neglected. Nevertheless, he laid no undue stress upon such stations and such preferments; but entertained just notions concerning what must ever constitute the chief good and happiness of man, and is himself believed to have made the most of them.

“Where,”

“Where,” says he in his *Adversaria*, “where
 “is happiness to be found? where is her
 “dwelling-place? Not where we seek her,
 “and where we expect to find her. Happi-
 “ness is a modest recluse, who seldom shews
 “her lovely face in the polite, or in the busy
 “world. She is the sister and companion of
 “Religious Wisdom. Among the vanities and
 “the evils which Solomon beheld under the
 “sun; one is, an access of temporal fortunes,
 “to the detriment of the possessor; whence
 “it appears, that such prosperity is a dan-
 “gerous thing, and that few persons have a
 “head strong enough, and an heart good
 “enough, to bear it. A sudden rise from a
 “low station, as it sometimes shews to ad-
 “vantage the virtuous and amiable qualities
 “which could not exert themselves before,
 “so it more frequently calls forth and exposes
 “to view these spots of the soul, which lay
 “lurking in secret, cramped by penury, and
 “veiled with dissimulation. An honest and
 “sensible man is placed in a middle station,
 “in

" in circumstances rather scanty than abound-
 " ing. He hath all the necessaries, but none
 " of the superfluities of life ; and these ne-
 " cessaries he acquires by his prudence, his
 " studies, and his industry. If he seeks to
 " better his income, it is by such methods as
 " hurt neither his conscience nor his consti-
 " tution. He hath friends and acquaint-
 " ances of his own rank : he receives good
 " offices from them, and he returns the
 " same : as he hath his occupations, he hath
 " his diversions also ; and partakes of the
 " simple, frugal, obvious, innocent, and cheer-
 " ful amusements of life. By a sudden turn
 " of things, he grows great, in the Church, or
 " in the State. Now his fortune is made ;
 " and he says to himself, The days of scar-
 " city are past, the days of plenty are come,
 " and happiness is come along with them.
 " Mistaken man ! it is no such thing : he ne-
 " ver more enjoys one happy day, compared
 " with those, which once shone upon him.
 " He discards his old companions, or treats
 " them

“ them with cold, distant, and proud civi-
 “ lity. Friendship, free and open conver-
 “ sation, rational inquiry, sincerity, content-
 “ ment, and the plain, unadulterated plea-
 “ sures of life, are no more: they departed
 “ from him along with his poverty. New
 “ connections, new prospects, new desires,
 “ and new cares take place, and engross so
 “ much of his time and of his thoughts, that
 “ he neither improves his heart nor his un-
 “ derstanding. He lives ambitious and rest-
 “ less, and he dies——rich.”

N. B. The Editor is indebted to his
 friend Dr. Heathcote for the foregoing
 Account, who kindly drew it up, from
 materials furnished him by the Editor;
 and it was first published in the Bio-
 graphical Dictionary, octavo, 1784.

S E R M O N I.

DEUTER. xxvii. 18.

Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.

MANY of the expounders of the holy Scriptures, both ancient and modern, have industriously sought after hidden senses, and sublimer meanings than the words obviously and naturally offered: and this method of interpretation hath been carried by some of them to the utmost excess, because of such expositions there is no end, when the sober rules of grammar, of reason, and of good sense are neglected, and the heated Imagination is let loose to pursue her own wild conceits.

The ceremonial Law of Moses, in particular, seems to have distressed both Jewish and Christian Doctors, because some of its precepts were in appearance strange, arbitrary, frivolous, and

Vol. I. B tending

tending to no useful purpose; and therefore studious and contemplative persons sought out mystical doctrines, which they supposed to lie concealed under the covering of the literal sense.

For these attempts to illustrate and justify the word of God, they are not to be blamed; they rather deserve praise than censure: but their attempts were seldom successful, and their example, upon the whole, is discouraging. As for the Jewish interpreters, their expositions were often contemptible, and such as might be expected from men misled by prejudices, and deprived of several helps which Christians enjoy; and to them one might say, The well is deep, and thou hast nothing to draw with; whence then shouldst thou have that living water? The ancient Christians too often imitated the Jews in finding out senses in the Scriptures which were never intended*. But this seems to have been the fault of the times rather than of the men. In these later

* The Pagan Philosophers also fell into the allegorizing way:

Vult (Chrysippus) Orphei, Musæi, Hesiodi, Homerique fabellas accommodare ad ea quæ ipse primo libro de Diis immortalibus dixerit: ut etiam veterrimi Poætæ, qui hæc ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse videantur. *Cicero* De Nat. Deor. i.

ages,

S E R M O N I. 3

ages, better methods of interpretation have been successfully pursued, though injudicious persons will always be found, who are incapable of receiving instruction upon this head.

It may be thought that, of all writings whatsoever, Laws and Statutes will not bear ambiguities and double senses, and cannot admit such refinements. Laws have something in their own nature repugnant to mystery. They are, or they should be, designed for general use, and be as plain as is possible, that he who runs may read them, that even the dull and the ignorant may be in no danger of misapprehending them.

But there is something very particular in the Mosaic Law, which both distinguisheth it from other laws, and carries with it an excuse and a plea for double senses which they have not.

The Law of Moses, as it contained a shadow of good things to come, as it had a reference to the Messias, and exhibited bodily and sensible representations of spiritual benefits and blessings to be conferred by him, so far it was unavoidably of an allegorical and symbolical nature. Yet it wanted not that simplicity and perspicuity which are requisite in laws. Moses gave the people the two great commandments, to

love God, and to love their neighbour, and many rules of life, and precepts of morality, with sufficient plainness. But the various ritual ordinances, the washings, the purifications, the atonements, the ceremonies, the sacrifices, the bodily pollutions to be avoided, and the bodily purity to be observed, these often were either figurative representations of holiness of life and purity of heart, or had a view to the future dispensation and to the Gospel of Christ, which in the fulness of time should be made manifest.

It will be said, perhaps, that the Israelites, who came rough and unpolished out of the land of Ægypt, where they had been occupied in mean and slavish employments, were not acute enough to discover and understand these hidden senses. It may be so; and if they could not discern them, it mattered not. There was enough for them in the Law which was of the plain kind, and suited to their capacities. But why should we suppose them so very unfit for this sort of instruction? The Ægyptians, with whom they had long dwelt, had many * mystical precepts, and their religion was

* Thence Pythagoras learned to veil his precepts under expressions which are mere riddles, and so dark that it is impossible to explain them with any certainty.

full of symbols and enigmatical representations. The Israelites might therefore expect something of the mysterious kind in their sacred Books, and it was a proper occupation for the learned to meditate upon the sublimer parts of religion, and to unfold them to the people.

Besides; the Law was not designed for one generation of men, and for one age, but for many. It is to be supposed that the people of Israel, being once settled in the peaceable possession of the land of Canaan, and obliged to be well acquainted with their sacred Books which contained their national laws, would improve themselves daily in wisdom and knowledge; and if they did not, it must have been altogether their own fault.

We must not think that double senses can never be admitted and allowed in moral precepts, and in rules of life and behaviour; for there are some such precepts in the Old Testament. But then the second sense, or the sublimer design, should usually be obvious, or at least discoverable, by those who apply the proper methods to discover it. I will mention a few instances of such passages in the Books of Moses, and then proceed to con-

sider the text, which also is a precept of a double sense.

In * Leviticus it is said, Thou shalt not curse the deaf.

This base action of reviling or cursing a deaf person is here condemned. But that is not all; there is something more forbidden by this Law; for it seems to be of a proverbial nature, and the general meaning is, Thou shalt not take the sordid advantage of a man's incapacity to defend himself, and hurt him either in his body, his fortunes, or his reputation. To abuse an absent person, to calumniate people in secret, to attack another's reputation in the dark and in disguise, to defame those who are dead, to hurt in any manner those who are unable to help and redress themselves, all this may be called, To curse the deaf.

Again: Amongst the Mosaic Laws are these †: Thou shalt not kill a cow and her young both in one day. If thou findest a bird with her eggs or young ones, thou shalt not take both the dam and the young.

Besides the actions which are here prohibited, every behaviour which shews inhumanity

* Chap. xix. 14.

† Levit. xxii. 28. Deut. xxii. 6.

nity and barbarity seems to be forbidden. The things here mentioned, slight as they may appear, are perhaps condemned, because they carry an air of cruelty; and if cruelty, and the appearance of it, or a tendency to it, was to be avoided even towards brutes, much more was compassion and pity due to men. A Jewish Commentator hath supposed this to be the spirit and import of these laws, and thus interprets them: As your Father in heaven is merciful, so be ye merciful upon earth, and destroy not in the same day a beast and its young one.

Again, we read in the Law, * Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind. Thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment of linen and woollen come upon thee. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.

Since the things which are here prohibited are not morally evil, there might be a further meaning in these laws, namely, that the Jews should abstain from all impurities, and that they should have no intercourse, and contract no marriages, with idolatrous neighbours,

* Levit. xix. 19, Deut. xxii. 10,

8 S E R M O N I.

I will not deny that these and other such singular laws might also possibly be enjoined in * opposition to certain rites and ceremonies used by superstitious and idolatrous Pagans. Nothing hinders but that a law may serve to more purposes, and have more views, than one or two.

The precept, Not to eat blood, is often repeated in the Old Testament; but where it is first mentioned in the book of † Genesis, it is joined to the prohibition of murder. One reason therefore for which feeding upon blood is prohibited, was, because it had a savage and brutish appearance, more of a wild beast than of a man; and by this abstinence from blood, men were taught to shun cruelty and inhumanity towards their fellow-creatures, and bloodshed, and murder.

In Deuteronomy ‡ it is said, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox, when he treadeth out the corn.

* This is the notion of Spencer. But this learned and useful writer, having projected a general, and in the main a rational method of interpretation, seems sometimes to carry his hypothesis too far; supposes Gentile superstitions, of which no traces can be found; introduceth the devil too often into his system, and lays some things to his charge which perhaps he never did.

† Chap. ix. 4.

‡ Chap. xxv. 4.

We

We have here a symbolical law; and the meaning of it is, that whosoever is employed in labours beneficial to others, ought himself to partake of the profit. This law therefore recommends humanity to slaves and to hired servants, encouragement to the industrious, liberality to the deserving, and public rewards to those who are useful to the public. For this interpretation we have the warrant and authority of St. Paul. It is written, says he, in the law, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt this is written; that he who ploweth should plow in hope; and that he who thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. And so forth.

I now proceed to the text; Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way.

In this chapter, curses are pronounced against several heinous crimes, such as idolatry, contempt of parents, murder, rapine, and the like; and amongst these crimes is mentioned this, of causing the blind to go out of their way; a wickedness of a singular nature, and which one would not expect to find in this list
of

of vicious actions. It is a crime which is seldom committed; there are few opportunities for it; there is little temptation to it; it is doing mischief for mischief's sake, an enormity to which few can easily bring themselves. Add to this, that in Leviticus this base action is mentioned along with that of cursing the deaf, which, as we observed before, is a kind of proverb, and bears a figurative sense: Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind. We may therefore reasonably suppose that in the words of the text, Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way, more is intended than barely to condemn those who should lead a blind man out of his way; and what that may be, it is not difficult to discover. Blindness in all languages is put for error and ignorance; and, in the style of the Scriptures, ways and paths, and walking, running, going, wandering astray, stumbling, falling, mean the actions and the behaviour of men. These obvious observations will lead us to the moral, mystical, spiritual, and enlarged sense of the Law, or Commination; and it is this: Cursed is he who imposeth upon the simple, the credulous, the unwary, the ignorant, and the helpless;

S E R M O N I. 11

helpless ; and either hurts, or defrauds, or deceives, or seduces, or misinforms, or misleads, or perverts, or corrupts and spoils them. This, I say, is the sense which may be fairly put upon these words, besides their literal sense. It remains to shew by what actions we may be supposed to be guilty, more or less, of this fault.

I. As to the Ministers of the Gospel, they may be said to mislead the blind, when, instead of endeavouring to instruct and amend their hearers, they deal in false opinions, or unintelligible doctrines, or unprofitable disputes, or uncharitable and unmannerly reproofs, or personal reflections, or flattery, or in any subjects foreign from religion, and void of edification ; much more when they teach things of an evil tendency, and which may have a bad influence on the minds and manners of the people.

To err in some things, and to be ignorant of many things, this is man's portion and lot, and infallibility belongs to none of us. Therefore in expounding texts, and in drawing inferences, and in explaining doctrines, in reasoning, and in proving, we may make some mistakes. But though a Preacher cannot answer for his abilities, and his critical judgment, he may answer for his heart ; and whosoever useth his
best

best endeavours to qualify himself for the office of expounding religious truths, and is clear from all designs of deceiving, from all dishonest and self-interested views, takes the surest method not to be one of those who send the blind out of their way; he will in all probability, by his own caution, and by the blessing of God, be secure from gross and dangerous errors. Christian morality shines clearly in the Gospel, and the great duties of life are written with a sun-beam; and as to points which are of the learned, or refined and speculative kind, and which yet are sometimes and in some audiences proper to be discussed, the more difficulty there is in them, the less proportionably is their importance, and the less hurtful are the mistakes about them, if we should happen to fall into any.

Many and severe are the denunciations in Scripture against false prophets and false teachers, who delude the people with lyes, and say, The Lord saith; and the Lord hath not sent them. For faults of this kind our Saviour reproves the Scribes and Pharisees, and cautions their hearers not to be misled by them, but to use, with due modesty and caution, the inherent power which every one hath and must have,

have, of judging for himself where his duty and his soul are concerned. As a man cannot see with the eyes of another, so neither can he believe with another man's faith, nor comprehend with another man's understanding.— It is a lazy modesty and a false humility to resign that reason which God hath conferred upon us, and to submit implicitly to the dictates of men, who are often positive and over-bearing in proportion to their power and to their ignorance, and sometimes so disingenuous as to teach and maintain what they themselves do not believe.

Without any censoriousness or uncharitableness, we can complain that the Church of Rome hath been very guilty in this respect. No personal invectives and reflections are here intended; for in that communion, as in other Christian societies, there are many well-meaning, honest, virtuous, worthy persons. But if you consider their Ecclesiastical State and System in general, as a Body politic, and as a Spiritual Power, it is certainly calculated to keep the commonalty in ignorance, and in an implicit faith and a blind submission to human authority; and, under the plausible pretence of unity and external peace, to discourage liberty
of

of conscience, and free and rational examination. But, to say the truth, there hath been too much of the determining and domineering spirit in * most Christian societies of every denomination.

2. In all our worldly affairs and intercourse with others, as we ought to act fairly, justly, and honestly towards every person, so more especially ought we to behave towards those whom we might injure with impunity, that is, without danger of being called to account for it in this life. To wrong the weak, the ignorant, the friendless, the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, this is represented in Scripture as the height of villainy. This is cursing the deaf, and laying stumbling-blocks before the blind, and adding baseness to wickedness. This is practical atheism; it is acting as if we had nothing to fear, except the power of men; as if there were either no God, or, which is the same thing, as if there were neither knowledge, nor goodness, nor justice in the Most High.

Some of this practical atheism is as common as speculative atheism is uncommon; and

* I wish I could except our own.

there are many persons guilty of these faults, more or less, who yet call themselves Christians, and fancy themselves Christians, and hope to escape the wrath to come by performing some of the externals of religion. And for this reason the Sacred Writers are so very careful in so many places to lay the main stress upon moral actions, upon charity, justice, honesty, integrity, and real piety, and to declare that nothing can compensate the want of virtue.

3. As nations subsist by trade, so trade subsists by integrity. In traffic and commerce, upright dealing is an indispensable duty; and over-reaching and defrauding is a vice, as the Pagan Moralists will inform us, some of whom have laid down excellent rules upon this subject. So that, to apply our Saviour's words, If our righteousness equals not the righteousness of the Greeks and Romans, in vain do we pretend to call ourselves Christians.

But if it be a fault to make unreasonable advantages in our dealings even with those who are upon their guard, and are supposed to be as skilful as ourselves, and who trust in their own judgment and abilities, it is far worse to impose upon the ignorant and the necessitous, and to

wrong those who have a good opinion of us, and place an entire confidence in us. This ungenerous and ungrateful behaviour is what the text calls, Misleading the blind.

4. Of the same bad nature is giving wrong counsel and hurtful advice, knowingly and wilfully, to those who have an opinion of our superior skill, and apply to us for direction. As likewise all dishonesty in offices of trust and confidence. He who hath the education, the instruction, the disposal, the fortunes, and the affairs of others committed to him, hath a double bond, and a double obligation upon him to an upright behaviour. The one is an obligation of natural and revealed Religion; the other may be called an obligation of Honour, of honour abstracted from all religious considerations. There should be no occasion for any religious motives to persuade a man that he should not injure his benefactor, ruin his bosom friend, and his friend's children, and starve those innocents to whom he is a kind of Deity, and whose eyes wait upon him, that he may give them their food in due season. He was accounted honest, faithful, friendly, and diligent by those who entrusted him; they loved, honoured, and respected him. To use them
basely

basely is a double fault, and a fault which several persons would abhor, even from a mere principle of honour, who yet are little influenced by religion. As in our dealings with men, to return good for evil is the sublimest degree of virtue to which human nature can ascend; so to return evil for good is the vilest depravity into which it can sink.

5. To take bad courses, to keep bad company, to be vitious amongst the vitious, dissolute amongst the dissolute, this is confessedly a great fault. But yet there is a greater, which is to seek out the weak, the young, the ignorant, the unwary, the unsteadfast, to instill bad principles into them, to entice them to sin, to draw them into temptation, to spoil an honest disposition, to seduce an innocent mind, to rob an unspotted person of virtue, of honour, and reputation, of peace of mind, of a quiet conscience, and perhaps of all happiness present and future. This is not an ordinary offence; it is to be agents and assistants to the Devil, and to do his work, and imitate his example. It is a crime attended with this terrible circumstance, that even repentance itself can be attended with no suitable reparation to the injured person. He who robs another of his money may repay

it; and he who slanders and falsely accuses another, may do him public justice by owning the offence; but he who corrupts the mind and the manners of another, can make him no compensation.

Of the same sort of crime they are guilty, who employ their time and their abilities, given them for far other ends, in writing loose and prophane books, in contriving and studying to do all the mischief that they can, in all times and in all places, to poison present and future generations, and to work iniquity even when they are in the grave.

We have seen what is the moral, spiritual, and enlarged sense of making the blind to wander out of the way, and by what behaviour we may be guilty of this iniquity. The faults which we have pointed out, like other vices, have their opposite virtues, which we ought to practise and cultivate.

If cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way, then by the rule of contraries, blessed is he who can say with Job, I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.

In general, we are obliged, as men, as members of society, as Christians, to brotherly affection,

fection, and charity ; in particular, we are obliged to give good advice to those who want it, and are willing to receive it, to use those well who confide in us, to assist those who are distressed and helpless, to abstain from all appearance of evil, to give no offence, to set a good example to our domestics, to the young and the ignorant ; for as an ingenious Pagan writer observes, the greatest reverence is due to children, and nothing indecent should be said or done before them ; and when opportunities present themselves, we should be kind to those from whom we have the least to expect by way of return, and who have nothing to give us, but their prayers and their love ; and yet these are no mean and contemptible recompenses. Affection and gratitude is all that we can give to God, and it is always favourably accepted by him. We should imitate him in this, and account a thankful heart to be a sufficient payment for the small good offices and courtesies, which we can bestow upon our inferiors. Suppose even this recompense should fail, yet, as our Lord assures us, Blessed is he who doeth these things ; for he shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the Just.

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S E R M O N II.

GENES. xxii. 1, 2.

It came to pass that God did tempt Abraham, and said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering.

BY comparing the Old and the New Testament together, it appears very plainly that the former is accomplished in the latter, that it centers in Christ, as in the Messias, that he was foretold from the beginning, as the person who should cure the evils which sin had introduced, and restore fallen man to a state of happiness and immortality.

He was to be the seed of the woman, the son of Eve, of the family of Seth, of Noah, of Shem, and of Abraham, of Abraham the father of the faithful, and one of the greatest

persons, and the most favoured of God, of any of the Worthies recorded in the Old Testament.

The first revelation made to Abraham, of which we are informed, was when he was seventy-five years old, after he had been long married, and had no children, his wife Sarah being barren. He was ordered to leave his home, and to go to another country. The Lord said to Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. With this divine order Abraham instantly complied.

When he was in the land of Canaan, God appeared to him again, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. This is the second conversation which he had with the Lord.

Afterwards he went into Ægypt, where his wife was taken from him: but God interposed miraculously in his favour, and she was restored

to

S E R M O N II.

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to him. This was a third particular providence, or divine manifestation.

Again, a fourth time God appeared to him, and said, All the land which thou see'st, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

After this, Lot who was his nephew, and had been his companion in his travels, was taken prisoner by four kings: but Abraham with his own domestics, and a few friends, fought with the victorious army, and overthrew it, and rescued the prisoners; and this signal victory he had all imaginable reason to ascribe to a particular providence.

Then God appeared to him again, and promised him a son, whose offspring should be as numerous as the stars of heaven. At the same time God made a covenant with him, and confirmed it by signs and visions, and revealed to him some things which should befall his posterity.

After this, when his son Ishmael was born, and he was ninety-nine years old, and Sarah ninety, God revealed himself to him, and promised him a son by Sarah, even Isaac, who was to be the heir of Abraham and of all

God's promises. At the same time the ceremony of circumcision was instituted.

Afterwards, the inhabitants of Sodom were miraculously destroyed, and Lot was miraculously saved, partly for the sake of Abraham, to whom Lot had the happiness of being nearly related. God would not punish those wicked cities before he had acquainted Abraham with his design. Abraham made supplication to God in their behalf, with a view to the family of Lot; and God granted him more than he promised, and protected his friends and relations from the general ruin.

Abraham once again had his wife taken from him, and restored to him by a miraculous interposition.

Then Isaac was born to Abraham, according to the promise of God, and Ishmael and his mother Hagar were sent away.

After all these favours, and these divine revelations, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only and his beloved son Isaac. Abraham obeyed, and would have put the command in execution, if God had not interposed. On this account his faith is highly extolled in Scripture; and justly, if we consider, first,

S E R M O N II. 25

how hard the trial was; and, secondly, how reasonable the obedience was.

As to the first; Isaac was his only child, his only son by his wife; for his son Ishmael was in a manner lost to him, and sent by divine appointment to dwell in another land. Isaac was given to him by a miracle in his old age, which must have greatly increased his affection to him. He had probably never done any thing to disoblige his father, but on the contrary had been good and dutiful. This son was to be suddenly taken from him by death, and by a violent death; and what was harder, he was to be present at it; and what was still harder, he was to be the executioner. How difficult it must be for a parent to perform an act of this kind, is what every one may easily feel and imagine, and it wants no words to set it forth.

Abraham took his son, and departed with a full resolution to do as he was ordered; and for three days together he underwent all the anxiety and distraction which must be supposed to have filled his heart upon this severe trial and cruel occasion.

We read in History of parents, who, being Generals or Magistrates, put their own sons
to

to death for transgressing military laws, or for rebellion; and preferred the love of their country, of impartiality, of justice, and of discipline, to natural affection. But in this hard conflict they had popularity, reputation, fame, glory, and, perhaps, pride and a rigid severity of temper to support them, and to subdue the tender passions. Abraham had the highest degree of natural affection to overcome.

Lastly, his only son was also the very person to whom God had solemnly promised signal blessings and a numerous posterity; so that the former promises and the last command seemed directly to contradict each other, and consequently might have staggered a less confirmed piety than that of Abraham, and have made another parent, if he had been so tried, unwilling to obey, and inclined to suppose either that there was some delusion in the revelation, or that he did not rightly understand it. He would have chosen to save his son, and to sacrifice his faith. Yet Abraham's faith was as reasonable as it was eminent.

For, first, he had, as we observed before, a long and familiar intercourse with God, and frequent experience of the nature of revelations,

and

S E R M O N II. 27

and so knew, beyond a possibility of doubting, that the command came from God.

He was ordered to go with his son to the land of Moriah, a land where there were many mountains, and to offer up his son upon one particular mountain which God would shew him. On the third day he came within sight of it, and distinguished it from the rest; which must have been by some divine indication, perhaps by a cloud or a fire appearing upon it. So this was a new revelation to him that God required of him this act of obedience.

He therefore concluded that God would provide some method to reconcile this cruel command with his goodness and with his promises. And this method could be no other than to raise up Isaac, and to restore him to a second life. Upon this supposition the immorality and the cruelty of killing a son would be removed, and the death of Isaac would be only a short sleep followed by a resurrection. Abraham, says the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, offered up his son, accounting, or reasoning with himself, that God was able to raise him from the dead. He considered that God had given him this son by a miracle, and thence he justly concluded that God could restore

store him again to life by a miracle. This was an eminent degree of faith and reliance, and the more so because there had been no example of a resurrection from the beginning of the world, and also because Isaac was to be a sacrifice, and his dead body was to be consumed in the fire, and reduced to ashes; so that the restoration of his son, after such a total change and dissipation, was as great a miracle as could be conceived.

By faith, says the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, by faith Abraham offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; * from whence he also received him in a figure. That is; Abraham was persuaded that God could raise his son from the dead; and according to his faith it was done unto him; † he did receive him

raised

* ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκομίσατο.

† This I take, with Grotius and some other Interpreters, to be the true sense of the place; though Tillotson, Clarke, Whitby, and many more, refer it to Isaac's conception and birth. The verb *ἐκομίσατο* far more naturally implies Abraham's *bringing away* his son safe and sound, than *receiving* him when he was born. And besides, the birth of Isaac is not so proper a type of resurrection, as his deliverance was. His birth from parents who were superannuated, and as it were dead, was rather an image of a *creation* than of a *resurrection*. Add to this, that the *Aorist* *ἐκομίσατο*, put for the

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raised up from the dead, raised in a figurative sense, when the sentence of his death was recalled, and when he brought him away from the altar. This was a plain and striking image and representation of a real death and of a real resurrection.

Thus have we gone through and considered this remarkable history; and the following important uses may be made of it.

First, We learn from it the true nature of faith, of that practical and active faith which recommends us to the favour of God.

Secondly, If we inquire what was the design of God in this transaction, we may plainly discern that it was not only to make Abraham an illustrious example of faith and obedience, but to foretel the death and resurrection of our Lord, and to make Isaac a lively type and representation of Jesus Christ.

As to the first, there is not perhaps any point of divinity which hath been and which is more mistaken and misrepresented than the doctrine and the nature of Christian faith; and this will appear by comparing these false and weak

Plusquam perfectum, is somewhat harsh; and that the tense, *he received* is preferable to *he had received*, if the context and the reasoning will bear it, as most certainly they will.

and

and fanatical notions of faith with the faith of Abraham.

One error is to consider faith as a mere assurance and firm persuasion arising from no suitable evidence and no sufficient reason, but from feelings, from an inward illumination and an irresistible impulse and operation of the Spirit.

This is a faith which must be useless to all, except the possessor, since he can neither prove the reasonableness of his own belief to others, nor bring them over to his sentiments by any proper motives. And as this faith depends only upon imagination, so when the imagination flags, or takes a new turn, or the inward light waxes dim, the faith is gone, having no solid support. And in fact it appears from their own confessions that such Enthusiasts pass alternately from one extreme to another, sometimes fully assured, sometimes doubting or disbelieving, now carried up to heaven, and then sinking down into the deep, and reeling to and fro like drunkards.

The faith of Abraham, as we have seen, was not of this kind. It was grounded upon long, and repeated, and miraculous experience, upon the testimony of his own senses, upon
numerous

numerous revelations made to him, and upon the veracity, the omnipotence, and the goodness of God.

Another error concerning faith is to lay more stress upon believing than upon good works, to exalt faith and to depress morality. The faith of these persons is a bold and a confident persuasion that they are favourites of God and of Christ, and certain of salvation; and this, according to them, is the principal part of religion, though the Scriptures plainly assure us that this is a most incomplete and erroneous notion of true faith, that faith without works is a mere nothing, that Abraham was justified by works; not indeed by legal works, or external rites and ceremonies, yet by works of righteousness, by an unshaken reliance on divine promises of blessings not to be expected in the common course of things, and by readily complying with a divine command of a singular kind, altogether opposite to the innocent passions, and to the imperious force of natural affection.

Another false notion of faith is, that faith is a blind submission of the understanding and of the senses to the haughty decisions of a Church, which absurdly calls herself the Roman

man Catholic Church, which scorns to prove her doctrines except first by affirmations, and then by blows. She requires of her children that they should sacrifice reason to faith, and humbly believe whatsoever she proposes; and this is the unavoidable consequence of her claim to infallibility, and of those impossible or unintelligible doctrines which in dark, ignorant, and corrupted ages were adopted by her, and sanctified with the venerable name of Mysteries. These, as they are directly contrary to common sense, can never be received, unless common sense be first treated as a proud, rebellious subject, and a dangerous foe to religion. The faith of Abraham was not of this absurd kind. He readily submitted to the will and to the orders of God, because he was satisfied and convinced that God was able to reconcile his present command with his former promises, and to make an ample recompense both to him and to his son.

Hence we may form to ourselves a right notion of true, active, practical Christian faith. It is a belief of the revelation which God hath made to us by his Son; it is a belief entertained upon just grounds; it is a belief of a future state of retribution, and more particularly

ticularly of the rewards promised to the obedient ; and it is a belief shewing itself by doing that which is good, and by abstaining from that which is evil. When the present temptations to sin are strong and urgent, and yet are overcome by faith, then it is that faith appears to the most advantage, and shines in its brightest splendor ; then he who performs an act of duty which is difficult and irksome, is a true child of Abraham, and a disciple of Christ ; and he who sacrificeth a favourite vice, is as if he sacrificed a favourite son. Thus faith is a victory not over our senses and our reason, but over our irregular affections, and turbulent passions. This is faith, the faith which the Scriptures recommend : other faith besides this they know not, but reject with disdain, as hypocritical, unprofitable, false and dead.

The misfortune is, that they who entertain enthusiastical notions of faith, in opposition to human reason, are not to be reasoned with to any purpose. No impression can be made upon such a mind ; no light can dispel such darkness.

Secondly ; If we inquire what was the design of God in thus tempting or trying Abraham, we may plainly discern that it was not only to make this Patriarch an illustrious and a

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lasting example of faith and obedience, but to foretell the death and resurrection of our Saviour, and in Isaac to exhibit a lively type and representation of Christ.

The resemblance between Isaac and Christ, continued through a great variety of circumstances, is extremely singular and striking, and not to be accounted for, except by a divine design and foreappointment, as will manifestly appear by taking a distinct view of it.

The birth of Isaac was miraculous and contrary to the common course of nature: so was the birth of Christ; and in this the resemblance was singular.

The birth of Isaac was foretold and promised by God himself: so was the birth of Christ declared before by the Angel.

Isaac had his name given to him before he was born: God said to Abraham, Sarah shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac. In like manner the Angel said to Mary, Thou shalt bring forth a son, and call his name Jesus.

The word *Isaac* signifies *laughter* or *joy*, which name was given him, not only because Abraham and Sarah had laughed when the promise was made to them, but also on account

of the joy which he caused to them at his birth, and as he was to be a public blessing to all nations, and in him the great promises of God were to be fulfilled. So the word *Jesus* signifies *Saviour*, and the tidings of his birth were tidings of great joy which was to be to all people.

Isaac is called the only son, and the beloved of his father; a title afterwards most peculiarly appropriated to Christ, the only-begotten and the beloved son of God.

Abraham offered up his only son, as God afterwards gave up his only son to die for mankind.

Isaac was an emblem of Christ in his death and resurrection; and in this there is that difference which ought to be between the type and the person represented, between the shadow and the substance; for Isaac died figuratively and typically, but Christ died truly and really.

Isaac for the space of three days, that is, from the time that the command of God was pronounced, to the time when he was laid upon the altar, may be considered as dead, dead by law, and by the sentence passed upon him; and when he was released by a second command, he arose figuratively, and was restored to life

again. So Christ was for three days in the state of the dead, and on the third day arose to life.

Abraham took the wood for the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac, who carried it to the place where he was to be sacrificed, and then he was bound and lifted up, and laid upon it. The like circumstances are observable in Christ bearing his cross.

As the most clear and express promise of the Messias was made to Abraham; so the most express and lively type of the Messias that we meet with in all the Old Testament, was Abraham's offering up his son: and as St. Jerom tells us from an ancient and constant tradition of the Jews, the mountain in Moriah where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, was Mount Calvary, the very spot where our Lord also was crucified and offered up for us*.

Our Saviour is represented constantly in the New Testament as offering up himself not only a sacrifice, but a willing sacrifice, and laying down his life not by constraint, but of his own accord. We may conjecture that Isaac also was in this respect a type of Christ, and that he willingly submitted to the command of God,

* Tillotson.

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though not without those fears, and that dejection which are incident to human nature. The account which we have of this transaction is very concise; but as Isaac was old enough, and strong enough to carry the wood for the burnt-offering, and as it appears not that he endeavoured to save himself by resistance or by flight, and as it can hardly be supposed that Abraham would kill him without first informing him of God's command, and reminding him of the folly of attempting to disobey it, and giving him hopes of being restored again to life and to his father, we may suppose that Abraham made use of all proper motives to induce him to resignation and submission, and that Isaac behaved himself dutifully and piously on this severe occasion.

* Josephus, who had no notion that Isaac was a type of the Messias, yet led by the circumstances, and by the probability of the thing, introduces Abraham, exhorting his son to resign himself to the will of God, and Isaac complying with great sedateness and generosity of mind, and makes the heroic virtue of the son equal to that of the father. And an ancient † Christian Writer, who was contemporary with the Apostles, hath made the same remark,

* Antiq. i. 13.

† Ἰσαὰκ μετὰ πεποιθήσεως γινώσκων τὸ μέλλον, ἡδέως ἐγένετο θυσία.
Clemens, *Epist.* i. § 31.

When Abraham was upon the point of sacrificing his son, the Angel of the Lord came and prevented him : when Christ had been the appointed time in the grave, the Angel of the Lord came and attended upon his resurrection.

Thus have we shewed the resemblance between Isaac and Christ to be so strong and singular, as to justify the supposition that the first was a type of the second.

That Abraham had a foresight of the Messias, who was to spring from him, and in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, is affirmed by our Saviour, when he says to the Jews ; Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad. And it is probable that when the great transaction of offering up his son Isaac was happily concluded, it was also revealed to him that this was a typical and figurative representation of the death and resurrection of the only beloved Son of God.

S E R M O N III.

MATT. xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest.

OUR Lord designing to inform his disciples that there should always be a mixture of good and bad men here, and that God would commonly suffer this without exerting his power in immediately punishing the disobedient, made use of a parable out of which my text is taken, in which he shews that he would not have the tares, that is, wicked persons, rooted up and separated from the good seed, from his own servants, but that he designed to suffer both to grow together till the harvest, till the consummation of all things, and that then the separation should be made,

In this parable, by the tares mixed with the good seed, we are to understand a mixture of good and bad men, not only in the world, but

also in the Christian world. By the kingdom of heaven is here meant the state of the Gospel, and the Church of Christ. The man who sows good seed in his field is Christ who preaches the Gospel to the world. The good seed are they who embrace his doctrine, and conform their lives to it. Amongst the good seed spring up tares, that is, wicked persons join themselves to his servants, and both thus united, constitute, or seem to constitute, one and the same society.

For these wicked persons may be said in one sense not to be members, and in another sense to be members of the Church of Christ. A Christian who deliberately refuseth to perform the conditions which Christ requires of his followers, and who is usually self-condemned, is not a true disciple of Christ, and will not be acknowledged by him for such at the last day. Christ is the vine, of which he is a branch, an unfruitful branch, whose end will be to be cut off and cast away.

But still there is a difference, as to the present state, between one who is a bad Christian, and one who is no Christian. Whosoever believes in Christ and in his Gospel is a Christian, though he may be a wicked one; nor doth he absolutely

absolutely cease to be a Christian, unless he apostatizes from the faith, and renounces the baptismal vow, openly or secretly. And the same holds true of religious societies, or particular Churches, grossly deficient it may be in faith and practice, but professing Christianity, and as such, Christian Churches.

We say of sick people, Whilst there is life there is hope. The same may be said of wicked Christians; for though without repentance and reformation their future portion will be worse than that of wicked Pagans, yet whilst any seed, whilst any spark of the spiritual life remains, whilst they believe in Christ, there is some hope, and there are some means of amendment. The sin unto death, mentioned in the Scriptures, seems to be the sin of apostacy, of renouncing Jesus Christ, and that after having received miraculous proofs of the truth of Christianity.

Again: This parable is also a prophecy of the future state of the Church, which hath been too exactly verified in all ages. Our Lord declares that many should call themselves Christians, and hardly deserve that name, that their lives or their doctrines should not be consistent with the Gospel. This soon came to pass,
even

even in the days of the Apostles: there were then persons who taught false and wicked opinions, and whose manners were as bad as their notions; and there were others whose actions did not agree with the precepts of the Gospel, which yet they acknowledged themselves obliged to observe.

Thus were Christian societies soon infected with persons, whose principles or practices, or both were faulty; and this is an evil from which they have never been free. That this might not be matter of offence to the good, and that they might not be tempted to suspect that Christ had cast off all care of his Church, he thought proper to declare that it should be so, and that God for sufficient causes would suffer it, without separating the bad from the good.

And possibly for this, amongst other reasons, our Saviour might permit Judas to continue with his Apostles, to teach us that if of the Twelve whom he had chosen, one was a Devil, much more was it to be expected that the Church in future ages should have pastors and teachers not better than their predecessor Judas.

Again: This parable intimates that in the Church, persons should arise, whose furious and blind zeal would be hurtful to the common cause.

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cause. No sooner do the tares appear, than the officious servants of the Householder desire to go and root them up. Whilst Christianity was persecuted, the Christians underwent ill usage with constancy, patience and resolution: yet they complained of it as of a scandalous abuse of power, and endeavoured to convince their cruel adversaries how unjust it was to destroy innocent people, industrious and peaceable subjects, for a mere difference in religious sentiments. But as soon as the state of affairs was altered, and the Pagans could no longer oppress them, they began to take up other notions concerning compulsion, and to consider it as a thing that might be good, when it was in good hands. Then the spirit of persecution exerted itself in the Church, and hath ever since continued in various parts of the Christian world.

This spirit and temper is discouraged in the parable, and we are there told that grievous inconveniences would follow such rigorous methods.

It cannot be supposed that God hath empowered his servants to destroy all those who should teach false doctrines or lead irreligious lives, because the most virtuous would often be the greatest sufferers. For Christians being unhappily

happily divided into many sects, and warm men of every sect thinking themselves the only orthodox believers, and sometimes the only good men, if they should all imagine that they had a call and a commission to harass or to cut off the bad, destruction and persecution would never cease, and the best persons would fall a sacrifice to ignorant and outrageous zeal.

It hath been a favourite doctrine with various Enthusiasts, that the Saints ought to inherit not only heaven, but the earth also; that the true Israelites have a right to plunder the wicked Egyptians; that the ungodly have no property here below, no true title to their goods and chattels, and that dominion is founded in grace.

Those persecutors who were not mere atheistical hypocrites and politicians, have usually been fanatical bigots, much inclined to this system, and ready to put it in execution, if the Civil Magistrate did not tie up their hands.

Our Lord then reserves, for the most part, the judgment of wicked Christians to a future time, in which he will try and condemn them himself. His servants are introduced in the parable, as desirous of being employed in
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gathering up the tares; but he commands them to desist, lest, says he, ye root up the wheat with them; lest whilst ye are indiscreetly busy in destroying bad men, ye unawares destroy the righteous.

No one indeed can be qualified for such an office, unless God should give him a power of knowing the hearts of men. Hypocrisy can conceal itself sometimes from every eye, except that from which nothing is concealed. Judas in all probability was like most other sinners in this, that he became not very wicked on a sudden; yet he seems to have escaped suspicion, so that when Christ declared to his disciples that one of them should betray him, they were surprised, and could not tell of whom he spake.

And besides; If God by his own immediate act, or by putting the sword into the hands of his servants, should take sudden vengeance of all bad men, this world would not be a state of trial, and we should be deprived of that freedom from compulsion which attends a reasonable service. The motives to obedience are now more suited to our nature. A great and a distant reward is set before us; great, to excite our desires; distant and unseen, to exercise our faith. A punishment is threatened, sufficient to
alarm

alarm our fears, because it is dreadful, and because we know not how soon it may overtake the offender; but it is not immediately inflicted, and therefore it forceth not, it only diffuades.

Add to this that the good and the bad are so intermixed, so closely united by worldly dependences, that they cannot be separated here, and the ruin of the one would be the ruin of both. There are and there always have been many persons in Christian countries, who if their opinions and actions were tried by the rules of the Gospel, must of necessity be deemed very bad Christians, and yet on other accounts are useful in their several stations, who have abilities, industry, learning, knowledge and experience, who have skill in arts and sciences, in commerce, in war, in politics, who have various qualities, which make them profitable, not only to their friends and families, but to the public. Such persons may so far conduce to the temporal prosperity of the nation to which they belong, that without a miracle it could not subsist, if they were all cut off. For the sake * of the righteous therefore God may permit

* *Dii quoque, inquit, multa ingratia tribuunt; sed illa bonis paraverant: contingunt autem etiam malis, quia separati*

mit such persons to pass their days with them, and with them to enjoy the common blessings of providence.

Our Saviour then hath given his servants no power to destroy others, or to oppress them, under pretence that they corrupt the doctrines of the Gospel, or live not suitably to all its precepts. But we must not hence suppose that neither the Church nor the State ought to have jurisdiction over Christians.

Civil Magistrates have the sword committed to them, to execute wrath upon evil-doers, to punish the transgressors of the just laws of society. These powers they possessed before the Gospel was preached, and these powers are neither diminished nor increased by the Christian religion.

As to a national Church, it is a religious society of persons professing themselves the servants of Christ, and promising to believe his doctrines, to obey his precepts, and to live according to the directions contained in the Gospel.

No person ought to be compelled by violence to enter into this society, or to continue in it. non possunt. Sati^{us} est autem prodesse malis propter bonos, quam bonis deesse propter malos. *Seneca*, De Benef. iv. 28.

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If any one likes it not, let him keep out; if he be weary of it, let him depart. Jesus Christ wants no unwilling subjects.

Christian societies have no right to require other terms of communion, in points of faith and practice, than those which are contained in the Gospel: but those they ought to require, and with those they cannot dispense.

Christian societies, like all other lawful societies, seem to have in themselves an inherent* right of discipline, a right of admonishing, censuring, and expelling scandalous and disobedient members. How far it may be expedient or practicable to exert this authority, seems to be a thing of a variable nature, and depending upon circumstances.

In the first ages of the Church, when Christians were few in number, compared with their adversaries the Jews and the Pagans with whom they dwelt, they exercised this jurisdiction amongst themselves upon openly wicked and impenitent brethren. It behoved them so to do, on prudential accounts, to keep up their character in the world, and not to suffer their societies to be a rendezvous and a refuge for profligate people, who would come in as spies

* Grotius *ad* Luc. vi. 22.

to calumniate them, or as cheats to eat them up and to live upon their charitable contributions, or as deceivers to teach them false doctrines, and to sow dissension amongst them.

But now that Christianity is the national religion, numberless impediments arise, which will not permit us to call openly to account all openly wicked Christians, to rebuke them and to cast them out.

As we cannot for many reasons execute this judgment universally and impartially, so there are considerations which may make us contented to be as we are.

For first, in Christian countries where the Church and the State are connected together, the laws of the land have taken a tincture from the laws of the Gospel, and most of the notorious crimes, condemned by the Christian religion, are also condemned and should be punished by the Civil Government, as injurious to society.

Secondly, very wicked and scandalous Christians lose their Christian rights and privileges, till they recover them by amendment; and in all our public acts of devotion, we do in effect declare impenitent offenders to have no share in the promises of the Gospel.

Thirdly, such persons usually withdraw and cut themselves off from Christian society and public worship, and seldom appear in religious assemblies, unless perhaps to qualify themselves for a place.

Many persons have thought that it would be an excellent scheme to make all people conform to one and the same religious system; and then, said they, there would be no need for a toleration, which only serves to keep up faction and schism. But the thing is as impracticable as it is wicked. They who would compel men to this uniformity by burning Infidels and Heretics, have as little skill in making of Christians, as those cheats who undertake to make gold, by mixing base metals with a miraculous powder, and melting them down in a furnace.

Consider those parts of the Christian world where there hath been only one Religion, called absurdly enough the Roman Catholic Church, supported by a false Moses and a false Aaron, that is, by the Prince and by the Inquisition. In such places every inhabitant hath usually called himself a good Catholic; and woe to him if he did not. But this Catholic hath often been an Atheist, a Deist, a Jew, a Mahometan, a Pagan, who hath passed his
days

days in dissimulation. And if, as some ingenious men have said, the worst heresy is a wicked life, there hath been no small number of such heretics in such countries, where ignorance and superstition is often accompanied with a most horrible profligacy of manners.

We may observe farther that from the mixture of good and bad men, there are several considerable advantages arising to both.

Why do the wicked escape with impunity? why do they flourish? why are they so fortunate? why is piety ridiculed and scorned, oppressed and persecuted? These complaints are almost as old as mankind, and they have been renewed from age to age; and yet, so far as they suppose that the wicked generally enjoy more happiness than the righteous, they are not just and well grounded, but the peevish expostulations of good men at unguarded hours, and when their minds were ruffled and oppressed with grief. For the truth is this; sometimes vice and sometimes virtue prevails; sometimes the best men are delivered into the hands of the ungodly, and sometimes these receive their due punishment. But in general the righteous and the wicked are equally exposed to the calamities and afflictions to which man

is born ; with this difference however, that although power and wealth may seem to fall most to those who deserve them least, yet goodness is more frequently accompanied with peace of mind, health, reputation, and the necessaries of life than vice, and therefore hath the advantage over it even in this world. True it is that wickedness is not at present attended with all the inconveniences which it ought to suffer, if there were no state besides this ; but we have already mentioned several reasons for which God doth not immediately visit the disobedient, and some conveniences which the good experience by dwelling with them ; and we will proceed to shew that from this mixture of both, many advantages arise to both.

The oppressions and persecutions which the righteous sometimes endure, and the ill usage, more or less, which they frequently receive from the wicked, cannot be denied to be in some respects no small inconveniences ; and yet these very inconveniences must be acknowledged * proper trials of virtue, which appears to the best advantage, when it struggles with diffi-

* — — — — — *Gaudet patientia duris ;*

Lætius est, quoties magno sibi constat, honestum.

Lucan.

culties ;

culties; and a good man thus proved and overcoming all opposition is often of singular service to mankind; his reputation and its influence continue through following ages, and allure many to imitate those excellent qualities which they must admire.

Upon the supposition that this were our only state, the low and afflicted condition of righteous persons would be a formidable objection to a wise and gracious Providence; and he who should distinguish himself by an adherence to virtue, might then justly expect to be so far distinguished by his Maker from the vitious crowd, as to be permitted, without much pain and sorrow, to pass his few days, till he returned to that everlasting silence and insensibility whence he was called.

But if there be a life after this, and various degrees of happiness for those who do well, and greater favours for suffering virtue than for virtue which hath not been so tried, such temporal evils are without question, though irksome for the present, yet upon the whole expedient and profitable. Upon this supposition, a wise man weighing the loss and the gain, would be willing to obtain the highest places in the kingdom of heaven, and in order to obtain

them would not refuse to be both almost and altogether such an one as St. Paul was, not excepting his bonds.

Much prosperity is so often observed to produce in the human mind a carelessness about the future state, and an immoderate love of the present, that perhaps the greatest calamity which can befall a man, is never to have had a calamity. But hardships and troubles often awake men out of this stupid and dangerous security, and the unkindness of the world will teach them to set their affections upon better objects. The same is true of Christian societies*: A decay of faith, and a corruption of manners have been the unhappy fruits of the peace and plenty which they have enjoyed, and they have seldom been more religious than when in a low and oppressed condition.

Besides these trials, there are other temptations, less violent indeed, but perhaps not less dangerous, to which the good are exposed by dwelling amongst the bad in Christian countries, and in peaceable times. Irreligious persons will endeavour to corrupt the minds of those with whom they converse, and over

* Euseb. *ius*, H. E. viii. 1.

whom

whom they have any authority; they will upon all occasions discourage and ridicule piety and probity: for if the good delight in serving their Father who is above, the wicked are not less diligent and less pleased in doing the work of their Father who is below. These trials and inconveniences have also their use; they give good men an opportunity of testifying their sincerity and their constancy, which could not shew themselves to the same advantage, if impiety and immorality were accounted infamous and detestable, and obliged to conceal themselves from public view.

Again; The good, by their unavoidable intercourse with the bad, may often be the occasion of reclaiming them, those at least in whom shame and self-reproof and reason are not quite extinguished. Good example allures to imitation, and virtue is catching as well as vice. There is in goodness an inseparable dignity and decency; there are also many blessings, which by the ordinary course of events and by the divine providence attend an inoffensive and upright behaviour. They who have departed from righteousness, but not so far as to fall into the extremes of vice, have frequent opportunities of seeing this, and by

seeing it they sometimes become sensible of their error and loss, and seriously wish that they were also in the favour of God. These honest desires may be to them the beginning of wisdom, and the forerunners of amendment.

What an unspeakable advantage is this, both to those who are rescued from eternal destruction, and to those who are the blessed instruments of saving their souls, and of turning them from sin to righteousness! What an honour is it to be an useful servant, and a good steward in God's family, and even a fellow-labourer with Jesus Christ!

Lastly, The good by dwelling amongst the wicked have an opportunity of observing the pernicious nature, and the sad consequences of vice. This will appear to be no inconsiderable advantage, if we take notice that even they who have long continued in well doing, much more young persons who have contracted no habits of obedience, may stand in need of various motives to constancy and perseverance in time of temptation. Of these motives few seem to be more forcible than the unhappy situation and circumstances of these profligate and notorious sinners, who have a body enfeebled and worn out with intemperance,

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S E R M O N III. 57

an understanding sunk beneath the capacity of a brute, a taste altogether depraved and vitiated, a mind tormented with furious passions, the seat of hopes which are disappointed, of desires which cannot be satisfied, and of fears which are just and well-grounded. The person who carries about with him this wretched mixture of sin and misery, is a dreadful and detestable example of folly, a living argument against iniquity, and an unwilling preacher of righteousness.

The advantages which the bad may find from passing their days with the good are manifest. The patience and the loving-kindness of God affords them all imaginable motives to amendment. God invites them to return to him by their own consciences, by the voice of reason, by the revealed will, by the behaviour, and by the admonition of his servants. They may see that piety is not impracticable nor uncomfortable; they may see persons of the same rank with themselves, of the same occupation, of the same age, exposed to the same temptations, preferring virtue to vice, and happy in their choice. These are favours which God daily extends to the most unworthy and unthankful, with no other design than to save them from perdition. But these
favours,

favours, if rejected by them and insolently abused, will add to their guilt and increase their punishment, and the remembrance of them will be a cause of continual grief and remorse at their departure hence, and in their future state.

Thus it appears that God mercifully and wisely permits this mixture of the good and the bad, for the trial of both, for the improvement of the one, and for the amendment of the other. Both pass their days together, both grow together till the harvest, and God makes his sun to shine and his rain to descend upon both, and allows both to partake in common of the common blessings of his providence. Thus shall it be till the end of the world. Then the state of probation ceases, and the state of retribution begins, and there is no longer any reason that persons of such different tempers, views, and behaviour should inhabit the same place. The wicked will then be separated from the righteous, banished from the presence of God, and sent to dwell with creatures of the same perverse dispositions; which alone would be a terrible punishment. The fear even of this should be
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S E R M O N III. 59

sufficient to warn us so to behave ourselves here, that hereafter we be not doomed to such cursed society, but may live with God, and with beings who love and imitate him.

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2 THESS. iii. 8, 9.

*Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought ;
but wrought with labour and trouble night and
day, that we might not be chargeable to any of
you : not because we have not power, but to make
ourselves an example unto you to follow.*

ST. Paul found it expedient on many accounts
to recommend industry in their worldly
callings to the first Christians. They who in
those times received the Gospel by their own
free and deliberate choice, upon serious exami-
nation, having arrived first to years of discre-
tion, who were convinced of its truth by the
signs and wonders wrought to confirm it, who
had been bred in Jewish superstition, or in Pa-
gan ignorance, and who were thus suddenly re-
moved from darkness into light, and from doubt
and diffidence into full assurance ; they, I say,
had these considerable advantages over us, that
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they usually felt a more lively sense of the evidence and the importance of Christianity, had brighter examples of goodness amongst them for their imitation, were more affected by the glorious promises of eternal happiness which were set before them, and looked with more indifference upon a world from which they had little to expect, besides scorn and reproach and malice and persecution.

But if their faith was accompanied with greater degrees of fervour than are commonly found amongst us, yet some inconveniences might arise even from that zeal. Piety, when it is not guided and governed by prudence, may degenerate till at last it becomes wild extravagance. A contempt for this world, and for all its concerns, may be carried too far, and St. Paul seems to have feared lest some should run into this extreme, and neglect to provide for themselves and their families, through a fanatical notion that a Christian could have no leisure for such low occupations, and lest others influenced by laziness, or by worse motives, should imitate them in this supine negligence.

For the Apostles, and they who like them were then appointed to preach the Gospel, had seldom leisure to labour in their worldly callings,

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ings, and had a particular assurance from Christ that he would provide for them. This might mislead other Christians to rely indiscreetly on the divine Providence, and to think that these promises were equally extended to them.

There seems besides to have been at that time a current opinion that the second * coming of Christ, and the end of all earthly things, was at hand, which might have a bad effect upon some injudicious persons, and produce too much indolence and carelessness in worldly affairs.

The † eminent liberality also of the first believers might prove a temptation to dishonest, sluggish, and insincere men (for such there have been in the Church at all times) to indulge a lazy temper, and to live at the expence of those Christian societies into which they had entered themselves.

Some of those Heretics of the most ancient times, who are recorded in Ecclesiastical History, were in all probability induced by no other motive outwardly to profess Christianity,

* This notion revived towards the end of the tenth century, and produced much mischief in the Christian world. See Mosheim. p. 372. & Bibl. Univ. ix. 12.

† Bonorum communio apud primos Christianos fuit liberalis potius rerum necessariarum communicatio, quam quod nemo quicquam proprii habuerit. *Salmasius* de Usura, p. 655, &c.

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than by hopes of a share in the public collections ; and accordingly, whensoever distress and persecution arose, and they had a near prospect of more danger than profit, they could easily secure themselves by deserting the Church, and renouncing the faith.

Thus, unless proper care were taken to prevent this evil, the Church, instead of being a society of honest, frugal, and diligent persons, able to maintain themselves and those who were proper objects of their charity, would have become a mere nest of drones.

St. Paul, therefore, as a pious and a prudent teacher, recommended industry to the Christian world, not only by precept, but by example.

He himself on more than one account had a claim to a maintenance from the public.

As a preacher of the Gospel and an Apostle of Christ, he had a right by custom, by equity, and by the laws of God, to receive a subsistence from those whom he instructed, as he proves in his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

As he was the Apostle of the Gentiles, the care of many Churches lay upon him, he had a much larger province than any of the Apostles, he was obliged to labour more abundantly in

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the Gospel than they, and therefore less able to spare time in labouring for a maintenance.

Add to this, that a small sum was sufficient for one man, and for a man who desired nothing besides food and raiment.

Yet he sometimes chose to wave even this privilege. I have used, says he, none of these things, neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. He chose rather to feed himself by his own toil and industry, by labouring night and day, because he would not eat any man's bread for nought. I have coveted, says he, no man's silver or gold, or apparel. Yea, you yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak.

Such a person might boldly and earnestly press the observance of a duty which himself had so remarkably fulfilled; and indeed he lays a great stress upon it, and represents it as more important than some usually imagine it to be. If any one should neglect to provide for his own family, we should perhaps call him a

careless, an indolent, an imprudent man : but St. Paul says, If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Study, says he, to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

And again ; When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Again ; Let him that stole, steal no more ; but rather let him labour, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

And in the text ; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you : not because we have not the power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.

We may consider this example of St. Paul as a precept, first of industry in our worldly callings, secondly of industry in our religious concerns. Each of these duties I shall now endeavour to recommend, beginning with industry in our worldly callings.

I. If we hope to acquire what is necessary for our subsistence, to * preserve it when we possess it, to provide for those who depend upon us, and to avoid gross and scandalous ignorance, labour of the body, or of the mind, or of both, must be undergone. I shall not endeavour to prove the truth of this assertion : it is generally known and acknowledged; and few have denied it. We † read in ancient history of a sect of Christians, who from those words of our Lord, *Labour not for the meat that perisheth*, concluded that they ought not to do any work to get their bread. We may suppose that this sect did not last long, that these sluggards were soon starved out of the world, or rather that ‡ cold and hunger sharpened their wits, and taught them to be better interpreters of Scripture. It may seem strange, and hardly credible to some persons, that there should have arisen such a sect as this : but daily and woful experience shews us that there is nothing so strange, nothing so senseless, which some men will not throw out, and which others will not swallow.

* *Dormientibus jura non subveniunt*, says the Civil Law.

† See Whitby on John vi. 27. Tillemont, Hist. Eccl. t. viii. 531. *Messaliens*.

‡ Magister artis, ingenique largitor Venter.

Industry in our worldly callings is necessary, because it is impossible to neglect it and to be obedient servants of God, as it may appear several ways.

Naked came we into this world, and destitute of all things which support and preserve life; naked also as to our minds, which at first are a mere blank, and have no knowledge. But the soul and the body are made and designed by their Creator, the one to improve in understanding, the other to increase in strength, and to be employed by the soul in a manner which may conduce to the welfare of both. Thus God by the voice of nature teacheth us that he designed us to be improvable and industrious beings.

To these deductions of reason the Scriptures agree in many places. They tell us that God put the first man into the garden of Eden, to cultivate and embellish it. Afterwards, upon his transgression, it was told him that his work should be increased, and that in the sweat of his face he should eat his bread. Great travel is created for every man, says the Author of Ecclesiasticus, and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day that they go out of their mother's womb till the day that they
return

return to the mother of all things. This is very true; and yet so many advantages both to body and mind arise from labour, that it may be made a question whether the toil which God enjoined to Adam after his fall, and to his posterity, was a punishment or a favour. Certain it is that labour, if it was brought into the world by transgression, is one of the best preferatives against it; if it was the child of Sin, it is the parent of Virtue.

Again; God who hath made us incapable of subsisting by ourselves, and obliged to our fellow-creatures in part, for the things which we possess, teaches us by the voice of reason that we also in return ought to promote the welfare of others. Before we come to years of discretion, we have contracted a debt of gratitude to those who have educated us, and to the nation to which we belong. We cannot refuse to discharge it without great injustice, nor can we discharge it without industry in our callings.

The Gospel strictly commands us to do good, to assist, to instruct, to direct, and to relieve. It commands us therefore what the idle person hath neither power nor inclination to perform. Laziness is always attended with ignorance, and usually produces poverty; and it is not to

be expected that he who is so negligent of his own body and mind, should be serviceable to others, and should love his neighbour more than himself.

Add to this, that in general whosoever is slothful in business, in his worldly concerns, will probably be a slothful Christian too; for the same temper which disposes to the one, disposes to the other, and the same difficulties which deter a man from labouring to live creditably, will discourage him from striving to live religiously. It is the nature of idleness to hate to take pains, and of goodness to be active; and therefore there is little reason to hope that they should meet and dwell together.

Idleness is the parent of vice. He who hath some end, some innocent and honest end to pursue, and is constantly busy in contriving and executing what tends to it, and hath accustomed himself not only to labour but to delight in his calling, keeps beyond the reach of many temptations, or if they find him out, will often send them away, because he is not at leisure; but numberless are the temptations to which the sluggard is exposed, and by which he is continually assaulted.

His

His understanding is furnished with nothing good and useful, it pursues nothing steadily, it hath contracted an aversion from serious study and meditation : his imagination will therefore be restless and rove in quest of one folly or other, for entertainment ; for the soul is busy whether we will or no, it cannot cease from thought, design, and action, of one sort or other, either useful or frivolous, either good or bad ; and when it is not directed to that which is profitable, and tied down to some particular work, will grow wicked for want of employment. A vacant mind is a proper habitation for a Devil : it is the house, which he cometh and findeth empty ; then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.

An idle person usually * loaths his own company, for which indeed he is not much to be blamed. He cannot endure to converse with himself or with his betters. This drives him to contract unprofitable friendships, or rather acquaintances, for seldom is there friendship where there is no virtue. He seeks out those who are like himself, and whose time is a burden to them : he becomes a companion of

* Omnis stultitia laborat fastidio sui. *Seneca*, Ep. ix.

mean and debauched persons; their bad qualities he soon imitates, and makes no small progress in vice, which is the only thing that he is disposed to learn.

An idle person, unless favoured by an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, falls into want, and thence into wickedness; for he who through laziness becomes poor, is usually prepared for any mischief. When he is reduced to straits, then follows, What shall I do? I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. But nature craves, and his wants are importunate: something he must do, and it must be something which is not laborious, and only requires lying, or forswearing, or cheating, or robbing, or some other vice.

Thus it appears that industry in our worldly affairs is a duty which God requires from us, that there is a closer connection between it and religion than we usually imagine, that it is impossible to live an idle life and a good life, and that he is really serving God, who is busy in his calling.

Another motive to diligence and industry is, that of all bad dispositions laziness is perhaps the most deceitful and the most vexatious, and that in all honest labour there is much satisfaction.

faction. The love of ease and pleasure produces idleness; yet such is the nature of things, that idleness produceth neither ease nor pleasure, but the reverse. All men value the conveniences of life: the idle person takes the surest way to penury. All men love respect and reputation: the idle person is ever contemptible, because he is ever unserviceable and ignorant, an * useless burden of the earth, salt that hath lost its favour, fit for nothing else than to be cast out and trodden under foot. All wish to have faithful friends upon whose good offices they may depend: the idle person very seldom finds such, and if he has them, he often loses them, because he hath no amiable qualities which may recommend him to them, and secure their esteem. All desire peace at home, and the love of those to whom they are nearly related: the idle person takes no care of his family, and can expect no affection there. All would † unbend their minds sometimes, and rest a little from their labours: but the lazy person, who would perpetually amuse himself, is disappointed in that also, and tired and cloyed

* — ἐτῶσιον ἀχθὲ ἀγέρης.

† — lusus animo debent aliquando dari,

Ad cogitandum melior ut redeat sibi.

Phædrus.

even with his diversions; for pleasure is no pleasure when it becomes the sole employment, and must be interrupted often and long by serious affairs, to become acceptable and entertaining.

The desire of the sluggard killeth him. He hath desires as strong as the most active and industrious ever feel, and indeed stronger, because he follows no business, an attention to which would drive out of his mind, vain and foolish wishes. He desires wealth and pleasure, and honour and power, and the favour and esteem of the world. He desires that these things would come and seek him out, and offer themselves to him, without any endeavour exerted on his part to obtain them; and these desires are usually disappointed, and leave him to the vexation which arises from inconsistent affections. Then * follow dissatisfaction, dislike

* *Inde mœror marcorque, et mille fluctus mentis incertæ, quam inchoata habent suspensam, deplorata tristem: inde ille affectus otium suum detestantium, quærentiumque nihil ipsos habere quod agant, et alienis incrementis inimicissima invidia. Alit enim livorem infelix inertia; et omnes destrui cupiunt, quia se non potuerunt provehere: et ex hac deinde averfatione alienorum processuum et suorum desperatione, obirascens fortunæ animus, et de seculo querens, et in angulos se retrahens, et pœnæ incubans suæ, dum tædet fui pigetque.* Seneca de Tranquill. ii.

Otiosum hominem, seductum existimat vulgus, et securum, et se contentum, sibi que viventem: quorum nihil ulli contingere, nisi sapienti, potest. *Idem, Ep. lv.*

of his condition, envy and hatred of those who surpass him in good qualities, and are in high esteem, of those whose labours are recompensed with success, and of those who, deservedly or undeservedly, possess the things which he covets.

These are vexations from which industry in our callings will secure us. It hath a tendency to preserve health of body and serenity of mind: it repays us with something that is grateful and useful. In all prudent labour of the hands or the head some acquisition is made; we maintain ourselves, and are not burdensome to others; we get skill, dexterity, and experience, and so learn to do our work with less toil and trouble; we improve our understanding, and find out truths which more than reward the pains of seeking them.

By industry we obtain credit and reputation. Every one is willing to employ a diligent person, and whatsoever his condition be, he cannot be contemptible.

By industry we shut out many implacable enemies to our repose, many fretting desires, and sorrowful reflections, and turbulent passions, and violent temptations.

By

By industry we become beneficial to others, able to assist our friends, to relieve the poor, to instruct the ignorant, and to provide more especially for those whom God hath committed to our care.

Thus much concerning industry in our worldly callings.

II. Let us now pass on to diligence in religious affairs, in working out our salvation, to which we have the most pressing motives.

The shortness and uncertainty of life warns us not to neglect it; for since upon our present behaviour depends our future state; since the days of man are few, few according to the course of nature, and often made fewer by a thousand unforeseen accidents, it behoves us to lose no time, but to set about our duty instantly, to day whilst it is called to day.

The reward set before us excites us to it. We think it reasonable to labour for conveniences which are temporal, that is, uncertain and transitory; and this industry is commendable. Much more should we exert our utmost care and diligence in securing to ourselves the unchangeable favour of God, the society of Saints and Angels, and an endless happiness

happiness which shall be mixed with no sorrows and disappointments.

Gratitude moves us to it; to serve him with all our power who hath done so much for us, with whose benefits we are enclosed and surrounded, which way ever we cast our eyes and our thoughts.

The punishment allotted to the idle and wicked servant calls us to it, to think no labour too great by which we may avoid the wrath to come. Infamy, and Reproach, and * Want and Dependence appear in terrible forms to us, and to escape them we are willing, if we have any spirit, to labour incessantly, and to submit to the hardest toil. Fools and blind, if we perceive not that these are nothing, compared to the woe, which must be the future portion of those who will not serve God here in this state of probation.

Our present interest invites us to it, to be most industrious in pursuing the welfare of our soul, which will procure us peace of mind, and the blessing of God even upon our worldly undertakings; whilst a neglect of our duty to him will be attended with fear and

* — malefuada Fames, et turpis Egestas,
Terribiles visu formæ.

remorse,

remorse, and give us an uneasiness which outward circumstances, however flourishing, will not be able to compose.

Such motives we have to religious industry. Every Christian will certainly allow them to have sufficient weight and force, and acknowledge that eternal life is desirable, and that it is an indispensable duty to serve God. But the illusion is this: We are inclined to think this duty so easy to be performed, that a very little diligence and caution will be sufficient.

Let us then consider what kind of expressions the sacred Writers use, when they speak of our Christian duty. They exhort us to be rich and fruitful in every good work, to be ready to every good work, to be zealous of good works, to abound always in the work of the Lord, to pursue and work good towards all men, to exercise ourselves in godliness, and in the labour of charity, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, to continue patiently in well-doing, to run that we may obtain a prize, and to press towards the mark, to watch continually and be upon our guard, to give all diligence to add one virtue to another, to walk circumspectly, to watch incessantly, to prayer,

to

S E R M O N IV. 79

to gird up the loins of our mind, to strive that we may enter in at the strait gate, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, to fight that we may receive a crown, and to war a good warfare, and to endure hardship as faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Thus the Scriptures tell us plainly, that without some labour we cannot be good. The difficulties with which the first Christians struggled were many and great; and difficulties of one kind or other will ever be arising. We are assaulted by importunate temptations; we often feel a propensity to go aside from our duty, and we are surrounded with bad examples, with multitudes who pursue their own destruction. When we reflect upon these things, we may perhaps be led into the other extreme, and suspect that the ways of righteousness must needs be disagreeable, and that the passage through them is tedious and painful.

But the Scriptures say that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness; and the word of God is true, and consistent with itself. That obedience is a labour, and that it is a pleasure, are equally certain. That these things are reconcileable will appear, if we consider that

that in all honourable and profitable employments, in all arts, in all studies, the beginnings are difficult, and the difficulties must be mastered by obstinate application. But many things contribute to lessen those difficulties daily, or to make men less sensible of them, as a sprightly resolution, present profit, the hope of still greater advantages, experience and practice, and long custom which is a second nature. Thus some, whom idle by-standers judge to lead a wretched and laborious life, are really most contented and pleased with their condition; for a man is just as * miserable as he thinks himself, and if he delights in industry, industry to him is a diversion, and idleness is a toil.

So also is it in our religious concerns. The duty of a Christian is a laborious thing, especially to those who have bad dispositions to conquer, or particular difficulties to encounter; but, † when we do any thing good with labour, the labour passeth away, and the good remains: when we do any thing evil with pleasure, the pleasure passeth away, and the evil remains;

* Tam miser est quisque, quam credit. *Seneca.*

† Ἄν τις πράξης καλὸν μετὰ πόνου, ὃ μὲν πόνος οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ καλὸν μένει. ἂν τις ποιήσῃ αἰσχρὸν μετ' ἡδονῆς, τὸ μὲν ἡδὺ οἴχεται, τὸ δὲ αἰσχρὸν μένει. *Musonius, apud Gellium.*

S E R M O N IV. 81

and then custom making our obedience habitual, an even temper, peace of mind, and many other present advantages springing from it, the hope not only of escaping future evil, but of obtaining everlasting life, and the divine assistance vouchsafed to us as far as it is needful, will by degrees make our inclinations join with our reason, and our duty become our delight.

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S E R M O N V.

ECCLES. vii. 16.

Be not righteous overmuch.

A WISE writer requires a wise reader; and therefore Solomon, in his introduction to his book of Proverbs, represents that person as a considerable proficient in knowledge, who is able to understand a proverb and the interpretation of it, the words of the wise and their dark sayings.

The sentences of Solomon are sometimes a sort of riddles, put forth to try the capacity, and to exercise the wit of the student, and to shew the folly of hasty and censorious people who condemn what they do not comprehend.

In this method of instruction, Solomon, and other wise men in those days, and in Eastern nations, affected to be extremely concise, and to convey a great deal in few words. But con-

cisenefs is attended with obscurity, and will produce a variety of interpretations.

Obscurity they thought to be rather a beauty than a blemish in compositions of this sort; as clear waters are shallow, and deep waters are of a dark complexion*.

These obscure sentences usually relate not to the elements and rudiments of religion, which ought to be perspicuous and plain, and adapted even to the lowest apprehensions; but they are precepts of prudence and wisdom, intended for proficients in moral, political and religious knowledge. The Ten Commandments therefore are clear, though all the sayings of the Sacred Writers are not so; and Moses reminds the people, that they had no pretence to complain that any necessary part of religious instruction was concealed from them. This commandment, says he, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it

* Pindar says of his compositions;

—Πολλὰ μοι ὑπ' ἀγκῶ
 νος ὠκεία βέλῃ
 ἔνδον ἐνὶ φαρέτρᾳς
 φωνᾶν ἅν' αὖτε συνέλοισιν' εἰς
 δὲ τὸ πᾶν, ἱερμηνέων
 χαλίζει.

Ολυμπ. Β. 149.

far

far off.—But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, wrapt in thy heart, that thou mayst do it.

The religion of the Egyptians, amongst whom the Israelites had so long dwelt, was all mystery, wrapt in obscurity, and delivered only to a few under the seal of secrecy; and this, doubtless, was a convenient cover for falsehood and nonsense. But in the holy Scriptures, every thing necessary for general practice is open to all; and the abstruser parts are calculated for those who have the capacity and the inclination to study them. And as in the Law, so in the Gospel, there is milk, and there is strong meat, there are practical precepts for the young and simple, and there are sublimer parts to exercise the inquisitive and the studious: and both under the Law and under the Gospel, it was the will of God that there should always be a succession of teachers to instruct the ignorant in all things necessary for them to believe and practise; and to explain to the more knowing the sublimer truths, which are perhaps sometimes rather the ornamental than the fundamental and essential parts of religion.

In the obscurer passages, which occur in the sacred books, an expounder of the Scriptures is obliged to have recourse to conjecture, and can seldom go beyond probability. He must offer such interpretations as he judges to agree with the intention of the writer; and if in his comment upon such a text, he keeps close to sound doctrine, and to the great principles of morality and of revealed religion, though he should happen to be mistaken in some of his conjectures, it will be an error of no dangerous consequence, since what he deduces will contain no religious truths, though it may not be exactly what the sacred author meant; especially if he delivers it with that diffidence and caution, which every wise man will use, where he is not absolutely certain.

Amongst these dark, concise, sententious and singular sayings, we may reckon the words of the text: Be not righteous overmuch. Here is a caution, as it should seem at first sight, given to men, to take special care not to be too good and too religious; a caution which their usual behaviour shews to be extremely unnecessary, which Solomon in his days had little occasion to inculcate, and which we in our days have as little occasion to recommend.

And

And yet as indiscreet as Solomon's advice may appear, discretion is the very thing which in all probability he is recommending; as I shall endeavour to shew in the following discourse.

It hath been said by some ancient Moralists, that virtue is the medium between opposite vices. This is true of virtue or religion considered in general; and it is true of some particular virtues, though it seems not to be applicable to them all. Religion is equally remote from lukewarmness or indifference, and from bigotry or superstition; and as to particular virtues, liberality, for example, is equally remote from covetousness on the one hand, and from prodigality on the other; and sobriety as to food is also equally remote from unwholesome abstinence, and from surfeiting and gluttony.

Solomon seems to have taken religion in this point of view, he seems to have considered righteousness as a disposition and behaviour, which may be overdone as well as underdone; and if we take his direction in this sense, it will not be difficult to apply it to various cases.

The over-righteous man, in Solomon, is not a knave and an hypocrite, for such a one is not righteous at all, and hath nothing to do

with the caution ; but he is one, who having a good intention and upright views, at least, no dishonest ones, yet wanting judgment and discretion, being weak and well-meaning, runs into extremes, and gets beyond his rule. Of this imprudent behaviour we are unhappily furnished with various instances, which we will briefly examine, by and by, one after another ; for they are so numerous, that we shall not have time to expatiate upon any of them.

At present we may observe two things ; first, we may learn to think respectfully of the wisdom of Solomon, whose advice, odd as it may appear, is the result of great prudence and long experience ; and, secondly, we may learn to be the more careful, since there are so many ways of being over-righteous, not to be ensnared by any of them, but to arm ourselves beforehand against these various temptations which lie in our way to mislead and deceive us, and which are the more dangerous to honest men, because they transform themselves into Angels of light, and wear the amiable face and the modest garb of piety and devotion.

Be not righteous overmuch.

I may observe to you, by the way, that as Solomon gives this surprising kind of advice to

pious

pious men, he also at the same time gives an advice to wicked men, an advice which seems at first sight no less singular than the former: Be not overmuch wicked. This looks as if he allowed frail men to be wicked in a certain degree. But it is no such thing: this would contradict the close of his book, and the result of his inquiries, which is summed up in these excellent words; Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man; that is, this is his true end, and his great concern. But as a skilful physician, when he cannot cure a disease, applies himself to lessen its pain, and to mitigate its malignity, Solomon seems to treat his wicked patient in the same way. If thou wilt needs be wicked, says he, be so with some kind of discretion: for there is a wickedness which clothes a man with rags, fills him with diseases, covers him with infamy, drives him into banishment, or brings him to a jail and to the gallows. Avoid at least all crimes of this sort; so shalt thou do less harm to thyself, and to civil society; and by abstaining from grosser iniquities, thou mayst perchance get a sense of duty and a taste for virtue.

But not righteous overmuch.

It

It is a melancholy consideration how nice and hard a point it seems to be for particular persons, or for societies, to keep the golden mean between infidelity and superstition, between irreligion and enthusiasm, and how apt many are to run into the one or the other, and to draw others after them into the same extreme. What our Saviour says of the path of religion, holds true of the path of discretion or prudence; Strait is the way, and few there be that find it; few indeed, comparatively speaking.

People of fashion and gaiety, who think of nothing besides this world, and the unrighteousness thereof, who are either professed unbelievers, or who never concern themselves about religion, these are a numerous tribe, even in Christian countries. The Gospel shines in vain to them: They choose to sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death. They are often much addicted to scoffing and sneering every thing that hath the appearance of sanctity, and endeavour to make piety contemptible, and to laugh it out of countenance.

Now a fanatical devotion, or piety without discretion, affords various objects of ridicule, which they know how to seize upon and to set off. The follies and impertinences of such people,

people, and sometimes the hypocrisy and knavery that shines through shallow pretensions to godliness, all these furnish a fund of raillery for the profane. Sober virtue, unaffected goodness, a zeal accompanied with knowledge and conducted with prudence, these are majestic and venerable, and it is easier for wicked men even to hate them than to scorn them. Such examples will not serve the purpose of the profane. Therefore they level their attacks against bigotry and superstition, insinuating at the same time that all religion is superstition.

On the other hand, there are persons of a devout disposition, but of a gloomy, pensive temper, and of a heated imagination, who abhor the profaneness and the carelessness which is so conspicuous in the gay and polite world. And thus far all is well, and they deserve commendation. But they stop not here; their piety is of that sort which sours the temper, and makes them intolerably arrogant and censorious. They think and speak uncharitably of those, whose devotion is less noisy, and whose religion is more rational. Reason is a thing which they suspect and undervalue, and they look upon the defenders of it as upon men infected with lukewarmness

warmness and indifference for the cause of Christ.

What now can be done for these two sorts of persons? Alas, very little; since the Libertine will not think, and the Enthusiast cannot think to any good purpose. Unless they will listen to Reason, to that reason which the one misemploys, and the other abhors, unless they will lend a hand, and do something towards mending themselves, little can be done for them by others.

The Libertine is by far the worse man of the two. If he hath abilities, he turns them against the Giver, and is not ashamed to have God for his benefactor, and the Devil for his instructor. The Fanatic, it may be, hath parts also; but his imagination hath preyed upon his reasoning faculties; and so far as this is constitutional, and a disease of the mind and body, it is more a misfortune than a fault.

But we may learn from the one and the other to take care of ourselves, lest a hatred for profaneness and dissipation draw us into a sour, mystical, unmeaning, ecstatic kind of devotion; and lest an aversion from this injudicious fervour betray us into a cold disregard for religion, and a levity of behaviour which doth not even
save

save appearances, which makes men talk and act as if they were ashamed of being thought Christians, which gives just offence to serious persons, sets a bad example, and hath a pernicious influence on the young and unwary. Let our piety be sincere and active, but let it be sober and sedate, and let us be more sedulous to lay a foundation of religious knowledge, and to act upon good principles, than to wind up our affections to spiritual raptures. Reason is stable, and her effects are permanent. The passions are fickle; they depend much upon the state of the body, and the ebbing and flowing of the spirits. Sometimes the brisk ones prevail, and sometimes the desponding ones. Sometimes the man says, with St. Peter; Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake; at another time he yields to a far less temptation than that which overthrew the Apostle.

Be not righteous overmuch.

1. In general, they are righteous overmuch, who run into any excess in the practice of those acts, which are of a religious nature, which are good, and absolutely necessary in a certain degree, such for example as prayer, contemplation, retirement, reading the Scriptures, and other good

good books, frequenting the public worship of God, instructing others, abstinence, mortification, alms-giving, and religious conversation. These things are overdone, when the practice of any of them interferes with other necessary duties, so as to cause them to be omitted, or when they are carried farther than the health of the body, or the attention of the mind can accompany them, or the situation and circumstances of life can admit.

2. Over-righteousness consists also in every thing that is properly called Will-worship. Will-worship is in general the invention and the practice of such expedients of appeasing or of pleasing God, as neither reason nor revelation suggest; and which, since they are not contained in the law of nature, or in the law of God, must either be wicked, or at least frivolous and foolish. This will-worship hath been in all times and places the constant concomitant and the sure badge of superstition. To enumerate all the modes of superstition, and all the shapes in which it hath shewed itself in the Jewish Church, in the Pagan and in the Christian world, would be an endless as well as a needless task. It sufficeth to have mentioned in general the nature of will-worship.

To us Christians, the Gospel is our sufficient and complete rule of behaviour; and if any Christian understands it tolerably, he will soon find his rule to be so strict and so excellent, that he will have no occasion to seek out and aim at sublimer accomplishments. Let him well consider his duty, as it is there laid down, and let him seriously ask himself the question, Have I complied with all these precepts? His conscience, I suppose, will reply to him; No, thou hast not: thou hast failed in this, and in that. Let him first live up to the Gospel, and when that time is come, we will give him full and free leave to apply himself to will-worship, and to works of supererogation. But that time assuredly never will come. His sun will set before his task is thus accomplished; and if God receives him to favour, it must be, not by an act of justice, but by an act of mercy, accepting his endeavours, and pardoning his offences for the sake of Jesus Christ.

3. Religious zeal being naturally brisk and resolute, is a warmth of temper, which may easily run into excesses, and which breaks in upon the great law of charity, when it produces oppression and persecution. The zealot pleads conscience for his own behaviour, but never

never will allow that plea in those who dissent from him: and what a perverse and saucy absurdity is this!

In countries where there hath been an Ecclesiastical establishment, and a national form of religion, persecutions have usually been carried on by men who in reality, and at the bottom, had no religion at all, but were influenced by political, or by self-interested views, joined to a proud and a cruel temper. Yet it is not to be denied that amongst persecutors there have been people really devout and religious, in their way, and acting according to conscience. We know for a certainty of one person upon record, who was such, namely St. Paul, before he was converted. Our Saviour says to his disciples, The time cometh when whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service. That time came soon, and St. Paul was one of these furious bigots. His example stands for an admonition to all men, especially to all who are in authority, to restrain their zeal from flaming out in unwarrantable vehemence in support of what they account to be true religion. For the same cause is the rash zeal of St. James and St. John recorded, who wanted Christ to let them call down fire from heaven,

to

to consume those Samaritans who would not receive him with hospitality. Ye know not, said our Saviour to these impetuous disciples, ye know not what spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

4. Over-righteousness hath conspicuously appeared in indiscreet austerities, a solitary life, a voluntary poverty, and vows of celibacy. I join all these together, because they have very often gone together.

There seem to be diseases of the mind, as well as of the body, which burst out at certain seasons, and are contagious and epidemical. This sort of fanaticism, of which we are now speaking, had its rise in ancient times, and prevailed all over the Christian world. Christians then began to be distinguished into two sorts, the secular, and the spiritual.

A good secular Christian in those days, was a man, for example, who was perhaps a married man, who was occupied in some honest and reputable calling, who was a good husband, a good father, a good master of a family, a good neighbour, a good subject, a good magistrate if he was in authority, a man courteous to all, kind to his relations and friends, charitable to

the poor, frequenting the public worship of God, respecting the ministers of the Gospel, a man who made it his endeavour to live soberly, righteously, and godly. We should be apt in these days to call such an one a good man, and to wish that we were plentifully furnished with persons of this character. But all this was accounted a low, imperfect, and vulgar sort of Christianity. The sublimer religion, which was then called Christian philosophy, was practised by pious persons, who bound themselves to a single life, departed from their houses and friends, gave up their possessions, retired to solitary places, and there spent their days in working with their own hands for a poor subsistence, but principally in praying, watching, fasting, contemplation, and silence; lived upon spare, coarse, and unwholesome food, and treated their bodies with so much severity, that if their Pagan enemies had used them so, they might have justly called it an inhuman persecution. This introduced the prohibition of marriage extended to Monks, to Nuns, and to the Clergy. Now a small degree of sober reflection might have convinced Christians that all this was over-righteousness, and the religion of good men who had zeal without knowledge,

and devotion without judgment. Yet this is what the Church of Rome extols, recommends, and requires.

5. This leads us to another instance of over-righteousness, which was common amongst the ancient Jews or Hebrews, namely, making solemn vows to God, without duly considering the inconveniences which might attend them. Such vows either ended in neglecting to perform them, which was perjury; or in performing them with a slovenly sorrow and reluctance, and in offending God, who loveth a cheerful giver. Solomon therefore speaks of this practice in a manner rather dissuading than recommending it. Better is it, says he, that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. If that be the case, then it is best of all to keep out of the reach of such temptations, by making no such vows.

6. Zeal or righteousness is carried beyond its bounds when men run into unnecessary danger even for a good cause. A man hath a natural right to profess openly that religion which his conscience tells him is true, if he maintains no opinions plainly destructive to civil society. He hath also a right to disapprove and reject errors. But this may be done out of season

and indiscreetly. The ancient Christians had a laudable zeal for the Gospel; but it carried some of them into excessive imprudence in provoking, insulting, and defying their Pagan enemies, and seeking out martyrdom when they were not called to it. But it was observable that several of these rash Zealots, when it came to the trial, fell off shamefully, and renounced their religion; whilst other Christians, who were timorous and diffident, who fled and hid themselves, and used every lawful method to shun persecution, being seized upon and brought forth to suffer, behaved by the gracious assistance of God with exemplary courage and constancy.

The example of St. Paul, after his conversion, is an example of pious discretion, and no Christian ever joined more happily the prudence of the serpent with the innocence of the dove. We find him escaping by flight from his enemies, pleading his privilege of a Roman citizen, taking advantage of the dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, appealing from the Jewish council to Cæsar's tribunal, and behaving himself respectfully and even politely to the Roman magistrates.

7. Another

7. Another instance of over-righteousness appears in a busy, meddling, intriguing forwardness to reform defects, real or supposed, in the doctrines, discipline, or manners of the Christian community. Every one is not qualified for the office of a Reformer. He hath a call, he will say: but a call to be turbulent and troublesome, is not a call from God. The Apostles, he will say, acted as Reformers, without asking leave of the Public. It is true; but they had good proofs to give of their call and of their authority. Since the Apostolical days, hardly any reformation ever prospered, unless the civil Magistrate had the conducting of it. The Rabble is a bad guide and counsellor in such attempts, and so are the leaders of the Rabble. The beginning of strife, says the Wise Man, is as when one letteth out water: and when the waters of popular strife are thus let out, the dirty torrent sweeps down every thing before it, good and bad, and throws all into confusion.

8. Lastly; A modest and a prudent man will not be over-righteous in the following instances:

He will not be forward to rebuke all evil-doers at all times, and on all occasions, when the bad temper, or the high station of the of-

fenders may make them impatient of censure, and draw upon him for an answer, Who made thee a judge and a ruler over us? Mind thy own concerns, and mend thy own manners.

He will not be fond of disputing with every one who is in an error. Perhaps there is not a more disgusting quality, next to vice, than a spirit of contradiction and litigation, even although it be exerted in defence of truth. Such persons seem to have it more in view to assert the superiority of their own penetration and judgment, than to inform others or to defend a good cause. They are most disagreeable companions, and most useless wranglers. It may be observed that in almost all debates, even between civil and polite contenders, the issue is, that each departs with the same sentiments which he brought along with him, and after much hath been said, nothing is done on either side, by way of conviction.—This will make a wise man not overfond of the task of mending wrong heads.

Mention hath been made, I think, of most of the instances, wherein men may be over-righteous; and it seems very expedient to warn all sober and well-meaning persons to avoid these extremes. As to the wicked, they want no
caution

caution upon this head: but a religious man often stands more in need of being guarded against over-righteousness than against profaneness, for this plain reason, that when he is tempted to sin against a known duty, he hath a monitor within, and is rebuked by his conscience; but when he runs into the devout extremes, he unhappily approves his own conduct, and his mistaken conscience encourages him to go on. And yet after all, it is true, that as to a man's future state, it will be much better for him to have been over-religious than to have been profane. The former is an error: the latter is a crime. The former is usually a fault of the head: the latter is a fault of the heart.

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S E R M O N VI.

NEHEMIAH v. 19.

*Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all
that I have done for this people.*

TH E R E is a disposition of mind called public Spirit, or the love of our country, which good men in all ages have exerted, which prudent men have encouraged by endeavouring to make it fashionable and honourable, which ingenious men have consecrated to immortality by their praises of it, which few men, how profligate soever, have had the impudence to censure openly, which Ridicule, that spares nothing, hath been almost afraid to attack, and which in our country hath been much talked of, and seldom found.

It hath been commonly said that virtues are better taught and better enforced by example than by precept. If so, we have in the person of Nehemiah an instance of public spirit, which
may

may be set against any thing that History can produce, and will not suffer by the comparison; nor can * Greece or Rome boast of an Hero superior to him in this great and good quality.

† Nehemiah was a Jew, who had never seen Jerusalem, which was not the place of his birth; but his ancestors had dwelt there, and were buried there. His father seems to have been one of those Jews who were carried to Shushan, where was the court of the Persian king, and who getting a good settlement there, would not embrace the opportunity of going to Judæa, when the Jews had obtained leave to return from the captivity; which doubtless must have been the case of many besides himself, who either on account of age and infirmity, or of their possessions and occupations, or of their neighbours, friends, relations, and old acquaintances, chose to remain where they had so long dwelt, and where they were, in a manner, naturalized.

Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the Persian king, which was a place of great honour, and of no less profit. He was highly in the favour of that prince, and very rich, and, as to this

* Grotius compares him to Camillus, and to the elder Cato.

† See Prideaux's *Connect.*

world, had all that he could hope and wish. It was scarcely to be expected that one in his situation would have bestowed a thought upon his remote and poor and desolate country; and not one of ten thousand in his circumstances would have concerned himself about it. If at that distance he had sent a generous relief to his brethren in Judea, and performed such kind offices towards them as he conveniently could, even this would have been a friendly and liberal behaviour; but he proposed to himself to do much more than this.

For some who came from Jerusalem told him of the bad state of that city, how it lay in ruins, and how the inhabitants were exposed to the insults of their enemies, and to the scorn of their neighbours, and were very weak and very miserable. Upon hearing this, he was greatly afflicted, and applied himself to fasting and earnest supplications to God, that he would look favourably upon his people, and then he resolved to take the first opportunity of addressing himself to the king.

One day, the king observed that he appeared to be melancholy, which had not been usual with him, and asked him the cause. He replied, Why should not my countenance be sad, when

when the city, the place of my fathers sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

The king granted him his request, and sent him to Judæa, as Governor, with powers to rebuild the walls and gates, which he executed boldly, speedily, and effectually. The neighbouring nations did all that they could to oppose it, and conspired together, and resolved to attack the Jews, and to destroy them, if they attempted to repair their ruined city. Upon this, Nehemiah did not order the people to go to prayers only, and to confess their sins, and to commit their cause to heaven; but like a pious and a brave man, he exhorted them to join with him in supplication to God, and at the same time to put themselves in a posture of defence. But his own words will express it best: We made our prayer to God, and I set the people with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I said unto them, Be not afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives and your houses.

Nehemiah found the people in a deplorable condition, overwhelmed with poverty, and

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eaten up with debts, and labouring under the tyranny of usurers and extortioners, who though they were of their own nation, yet took a base advantage of their distress, and lent them money upon excessive interest, so that they were forced to sell their lands, and then their children, to buy bread. This oppression and iniquity he entirely removed, partly by persuasion, and partly by authority, and obliged all persons to make restitution of this illegal gain, and to swear that they would do so no more.

Amongst the Jews there were false and treacherous brethren, men who were in a foreign interest, and received bribes from the idolatrous neighbours, and who sought to bring an invasion upon their own country, and to distress the people and the Governor; and amongst these apostates there were priests, and prophets, false prophets, who gave out predictions to frighten the Jews; and one of whom told Nehemiah that there was a conspiracy formed against him, and assassins determined to kill him; and advised him to go and shut himself up in the temple, and offered him his assistance and his company. And I answered, says Nehemiah, Should such a man as I flee?
Who

Who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.

Nehemiah then returned to the Persian court, and obtained leave to come again as Governor, and proceeded to reform both the Church and State of the Jews. The Emperor Augustus boasted that he had found Rome built with bricks, and left it built with marble. Nehemiah found Jerusalem an heap of rubbish, and left it so well inhabited, adorned, and fortified, that it soon became a city of note, and recovered in a great measure its former lustre.

He and Ezra caused the law of God to be read and explained to the people, and all its rites and precepts to be religiously observed; and then began Synagogues to be erected in many places, and the people to meet there regularly every sabbath day, which kept up the face at least of religion amongst them, and also preserved them from idolatry ever after, though God soon ceased to raise them up any more prophets.

Nehemiah continued Governor for twelve years, and supported his dignity with great magnificence and liberality; and this vast expence he bore from his own private fortunes, without

S E R M O N VI. 111

without taking any thing from the nation, or accepting the allowance which the other Governors before him had received; and, which is no less * commendable, difficult, and uncommon, he also governed his own family, and kept his domestics in good order, and suffered them not to pillage or to insult the people.

Nehemiah went again to Persia, and returning to Jerusalem found many corruptions crept in during his absence, which he instantly reformed with zeal and resolution. He probably continued in his government to the time of his death, which seems to have been in a very old age, when he was full of years and honour.

If he had lived in some polite age and country, he would have had statues erected in the public places, and all the regard paid to him which a generous and ingenious people can bestow upon true merit. But as he did what he did principally for the service of God, and of religion, he desired to have his reward rather from God than from men; and therefore he

* — *causas bellorum (Agricola) statuit excindere. A se suisque orsus, primum domum suam coercuit, quod plerisque haud minus arduum est, quam provinciam regere. Tacitus, Vit. Agric. 19.*

breaks out once and again in these words: Think upon me, my God, for good, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. He prays that God would accept his good intentions, and forgive his imperfections.

He had his recompense in both worlds; happy in the love of his people, happy in seeing his honest labours blessed with great success; and his own history written by himself, and being part of the holy Scriptures, transmits his name and his reputation to all generations, when statues and pillars, and other frail monuments of human gratitude moulder away and fall into oblivion.

And now, to make a proper use of this bright example, I shall offer some observations concerning the love of our country, and the behaviour by which it is evidenced.

It may be justly affirmed, that there is no one good and commendable quality, of which there is not some precept, or some example in the holy Scriptures. A conceited, fantastical, and half-learned Writer of this nation hath said of the Gospel, that it neither recommends private friendship, nor the love of our country. The answer is obvious :

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First, there are many examples of these dispositions recorded both in the Old and in the New Testament. Our Lord himself had his particular friends; himself burst into tears at the foresight of the calamities, which were to overwhelm his unhappy country, though he was not to partake of them.

Secondly, The Scriptures of the Old Testament, if rightly understood, have fairly intimated, and the Gospel hath expressly taught, that we ought to love all mankind. Now by this precept, Religion sufficiently enforceth both private friendship and public spirit, and at the same time corrects a vitious excess to which each of those affections are very prone, namely, a regard shewed to one person, or to one nation, at the expence of the duty to mankind. This was evidently the case amongst the Greeks and the Romans, many of whose eminent Leaders, to advance the wealth and grandeur of their own people, scrupled not to oppress and pillage other nations. Their courage and conduct are set in the most favourable light by their own ingenious and partial Historians; but if examined by the rules of reason, must usually stand condemned as mere outrages and robberies.

Sacred History informs us that God created only two persons, from whom all of us descended. It was so ordered perhaps, with this intention, that in the infant world the first race might grow up in peace and love in one family, and under one father and mother, and that when they were dispersed, they might still remember that they were all of one original, the children of one human father, and of one heavenly Father, and so might retain a brotherly love and regard to each other, howsoever separated in different places.

Reason and the light of nature shew us that men are all partakers of one common nature, all are born and live and die, all have a body and a soul, and the same affections, inclinations and wants, all have the same natural and moral law to observe, and nothing can be more like one man than another is. There is therefore a relation between man and man much closer than between man and angel, or man and brute. This also should create mutual benevolence, and he who loves himself should love another, who is his other self and his own image.

Our Saviour hath enforced and inculcated this duty so particularly and frequently, that
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it is altogether needless to produce proofs of it.

Under this general duty of love to our fellow-creatures is comprised the love of particulars, of those especially to whom we are most obliged and nearest related, and of those with whom we are united in civil society. But this particular duty to parents, children, kings, governors, teachers, brethren, friends, benefactors, countrymen, is to be regulated by the general duty. We must so love these, as not to cast off regard to others, much less to injure them.

The love of our friends is in some sense natural, it often grows up with us, it prevents reason and reflection: it is therefore a duty which may in a great measure be trusted to us, and which wants rather to be explained than enforced. But the love of mankind is a manly thing, a sublimer affection, and wants to be well recommended, and strictly required; for, as our Saviour observes, If ye love those who love you, it is no great virtue; even children do it: and if ye love your own country better than another nation, do not the Pagans the same?

The love of our country is then commendable when it is reasonable; for there may certainly be cases and circumstances when it ceaseth to be a particular duty, and when we may and should love and serve another country preferably to our own native land. Such, for instance, is the case of those who flying from tyranny and persecution have been courteously received in other nations, and have obtained there the rights and privileges of citizens, of which they had been unjustly deprived at home. But it is beside my present purpose to discuss this point. I am now to shew what duty we owe to our country, and to recommend the behaviour of Nehemiah to our imitation, as far as our condition and abilities will permit. The character of Nehemiah is uncommon. Such Princes and such Governors as he do not often make their appearance, and it is very well if a few are to be found in the world who have the honour in some degree to resemble him.

Nehemiah was ruler of a nation, and, as such, can be no example to private persons, though he be an excellent one to princes and governors, who if they' would be esteemed as he was, must act as he did. For though wealth and power may be obtained by many ways, yet
respect

respect and reputation can only be acquired by deserving them. But the submission which the sober and religious part of the Jews paid to Nehemiah is an example to us how we should behave ourselves to good kings and rulers, and even to tolerable rulers. We should willingly obey and assist them, shew them the respect due to their station, neither say nor do any thing that may lessen their character, and weaken their authority, and pray for their peace and prosperity, upon which indeed our own depends, and with which it is connected.

Nehemiah was a zealous supporter of the Law of God; and in this he is an example to persons in authority; with such limitations however as the difference between the Jewish œconomy and the Christian dispensation suggests. For the political laws of the Jews are no laws to us, any farther than they are confirmed by Reason, or by the Gospel.

The enforcing of Religion is perhaps one of the most nice and difficult duties of a Christian magistrate. It requires caution, good temper, prudence, dexterity, and probity, to give no encouragement to licentiousness, and yet to avoid all such compulsion as may injure civil liberty or invade the rights of conscience: for as vice is

the reproach and the ruin of any people, so is persecution. Therefore Christian governments are necessitated to overlook and connive at some immoralities, at some irreligious and profane talkers and writers; not because such offenders deserve any favour or toleration, or any thing better than a jail, but because it is so very hard to find out and apply a general remedy, which is not in one respect or other as bad as the disease. What is speculatively right, and what is practicable, are two things.

Nehemiah loved his country, principally because it was the seat of true religion, the place where God had chosen to put his name, and to fix his worship. The same reason have we to love our country, where the Protestant religion is established, a religion purged from many gross errors which ignorance, superstition, and arbitrary power had introduced into the Church; where the Scriptures are put into the hands of the people, and divine service performed in the vulgar tongue; where men are at liberty to follow the dictates of their own conscience, and to serve God in their own way, a favour extended even to those who would not shew the same indulgence, and who never yet failed to persecute heretics and schismatics, when they had it in their power;

where we have a religious system and constitution, which, though to call it perfect, would be to pay it a compliment at the expence of truth, yet comparatively speaking, must be allowed far preferable to the principles and the notions which prevail in many parts of the Christian world.

Nehemiah loved his country, probably for the sake of its civil government, which was not tyrannical and arbitrary, but in many respects somewhat like ours. If we love not our country for the same reason, we are not worthy of those laws and privileges which advantageously distinguish us from many other kingdoms, and which we ought to preserve as a sacred deposit, and transmit to our posterity, and rather part with our lives than with our liberties.

Nehemiah set the people an example of piety, and endeavoured above all things to make them religious, and thereby to secure to them the favour and protection of God. In this we should imitate him, and without this in vain do we pretend to love our country. It was judiciously said, that an * orator is a good man skilled in speaking. For if he be not good, he cannot be an Orator; he is only a Prater; and all his eloquence, though he possess it in a considerable de-

* Vir bonus, dicendi peritus,

gree, signifies little, and hath small influence. In like manner, a Patriot is a religious man, who employs himself in serving the public; and a good citizen is one who loves God and his neighbour. Whosoever neglects his duty to God, cannot perform his duty to the public in a complete and effectual manner. There are, as there ever have been, men who have little religion, and yet some share of what we commonly call honour and public spirit, who would not injure their nation for private advantage, and would risque their fortunes or their lives for their country. Yet these persons often do more harm another way, by their immoralities, by setting a bad example, and corrupting the minds of men, than they can compensate by intrepidity, generosity, and honour.

But in reality, a patriot without religion, and an honest man without the fear of God, is one of the most uncommon creatures upon earth; and unhappy are the people who have nothing better to trust to than to the honour of such Counsellors and Magistrates. Let revenge, or ambition, or pride, or lust, or profit, tempt the man to a base and vile action, and you may as well hope to bind up an hungry tiger with a cobweb, as to hold this debauched patriot in

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the visionary chains of Decency, or to charm him with the intellectual beauty of Truth and Reason.

There never was perhaps a wiser and a greater ruler than Moses, or one who had a sincerer affection for the people committed to his care. His piety enabled him many times to save his nation, when his courage and his conduct would have stood him in no stead. Often had God threatened to destroy the whole congregation, and to make him the father and founder of a new people; but by his earnest entreaties he averted the divine wrath, and obtained pardon for them. In all this there was something extraordinary: but from the whole tenor of the Scriptures it appears that the prayers of the righteous are prevalent with God, and may bring down blessings upon themselves, and their families, and their country. If so, a poor man, who is covered with obscurity, and is scarcely known to his next neighbour, may, by his intercession with his heavenly Father, do his country more service than the wisest statesman, or the ablest general.

Of all the titles that were ever given to a man, the most glorious and the most desirable is to be called, Father of his country, and there have been Princes who have received it with tears of joy, as the greatest of all honours. But there
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is a title greater than this, which God gave to Abraham, when he called him, Abraham my friend. To be styled, the friend of God, by the Almighty himself, is something far above all the appellations which human custom, and human gratitude, and human flattery can bestow. Such a person must needs be the best and the most useful friend to mankind, and to his own country.

In the character of Nehemiah we see liberality, disinterestedness, courage, industry, uniformity of conduct, and every social accomplishment. Though our situation and circumstances permit us not to do what he did, yet we may shew the same temper, by acting boldly and honourably in our station, by discountenancing profaneness and immorality, by encouraging virtue and knowledge, and learning, and useful arts and sciences; by rejecting all unlawful gain, all private profit which is detrimental to society; by relieving the wants of our brethren; by submitting to the inconveniences and hardships which the public good may at any time require; by loving our religion and liberties better than the wages of slavery and iniquity; and by acting thus constantly and steadily, whether it be fashionable or unfashionable, whether it be safe or dangerous.

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gerous. This is the general duty of subjects; and as to the Ministers of the Gospel, they are more particularly obliged both to teach and practise obedience to the Government in all things lawful; not for fear of punishment, which is servile; nor for lucre, which is sordid; but for the sake of a good conscience, for the sake of their own solemn engagements, and of the public tranquillity and welfare.

SER-

S E R M O N VII.

PROV. xxii. 2.

*The rich and poor meet together : the Lord is the
maker of them all.*

TWO propositions are contained in these words.

I. That in all nations there are rich, and there are poor people ; and that this difference of condition is unavoidable.

II. That they have all one common Father, whose providence extends over them all, and who permits this inequality for wise and good purposes.

They may be called rich, who have a large property, which sufficeth not only for the necessities, but for all the conveniences of life, and is suited to support them in a genteel rank. They may be called poor, who having no property, or very little, live, as it is said, from hand to mouth, and are obliged to support themselves

themselves by daily labour ; so that if they lose their health, or their employment, and the opportunities of earning their subsistence, they will be reduced to want, and to a dependence upon the charity of others.

All nations, as it is well known, contain in them these two sorts of citizens; besides whom there is a third and a numerous class of persons, who are placed in a middle state, who may be called poor, when compared with the rich ; and rich, when compared with the poor.

Again, there are some who are excessively rich, and possess more than can be of real benefit to themselves and their families ; and there are some who are absolutely destitute of the necessities of life, and truly in a starving condition.

These various states God in the course of his providence permits ; and though he doth not approve of them all, yet neither doth he visibly interpose to prevent them. Certainly it is not the will of God that there should be in civil society any persons immoderately rich, or extremely necessitous ; any more than it is the will of God that men should be wicked and irreligious. To permit is one thing : to approve and like is another thing.

And

And now I proceed to the first proposition.

1. In all civil societies there are rich and there are poor people. This is the unavoidable consequence of the constitution of things. It will appear to be so, if we examine whence ariseth wealth, and whence ariseth poverty.

Now riches arise from three causes, from the virtues and abilities of men, from the vices of men, and from chance or good fortune, as it is usually called, that is, from events towards which the rich man himself contributes little or nothing.

Riches arise from the virtues and the useful qualities of men. Thus when a person hath good natural abilities, joined to an honest heart, and is so situated that he hath opportunities of improving and exerting his talents; when he can be serviceable to the public; when he is industrious, prudent, just, sober, civil, and charitable; when he is beloved, respected, assisted, and trusted, he often receives the temporal reward of his labours and virtues, and becomes rich. Hence in those parts of Scripture, which contain prudential and political precepts, industry, honesty, and charity are frequently recommended, as the way to raise a man's fortune; at least, as the way to secure him from friendless indigence.

Again,

Again, on the contrary, riches arise also from the vices of men, and in that sense are the Mammon of unrighteousness. We know that there are in all times and places persons to be found, who grow rich and powerful by unjustifiable methods, by extortion, by fraud, by violence, by flattering the Great, by courting and pleasing the Worthless and the Debauched, by prostituting their conscience, by sordid simony, by covetous industry, by various oblique and scandalous ways, to which no person of honour will submit. Providence sometimes permits such wretches to thrive; whence we may learn the small value of abundant wealth, in the sight of God, and in a just estimate of things.

Riches also, and indeed very often, arise from that which is called Chance or Fortune; as when they descend to a man by inheritance, and he enjoys the title and estate of his ancestors, and reaps where he did not sow; when he receives favours from those of whom he had no reason to expect them; when they are thrown in his way by unforeseen accidents, and he hath nothing to do, but to stretch out his hand and receive them. These are the three sources of wealth.

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To the same three causes poverty may also be ascribed.

It arises sometimes from the virtues of men; and this happens more especially when men live under a wicked and tyrannical government, or suffer oppression and persecution for the sake of religion. History both ancient and modern affords us many instances of such sufferings. In this case a man hath no cause to be ashamed of his poverty. His poverty is his crown and his glory.

Persons who have dissipated an ample fortune, and are become necessitous by vanity, luxury, and debauchery, who even then are not ashamed of their vices, who take a pleasure in recollecting their past adventures, and boast of their art of confounding their money, who despise the oeconomy and temperance even of those to whom they apply for relief, such persons are to be found up and down in society, and such genteel beggars are truly most odious and contemptible objects. If sensible and good-natured people are induced to relieve them, what they give, they give * not to the man, but to humanity.

* Non homini, sed humanitati.

Persons who are fallen from a wealthy to an indigent state, not through their own fault, but by public or private calamities, these are frequently to be found, and these are proper objects of friendly assistance and support. Every one who hath principles of virtue and religion will be glad to serve them; and considering the fluctuating state of this world, a prudent person ought to think that whilst he is serving them, he is serving himself, since their case to-day may be his case to-morrow.

But persons who have lost all in times of persecution, and have been obliged to quit house, and friends, and land, and country for the sake of a good conscience, these stand in a much higher rank, these are entitled not only to relief, but to respect and veneration. Thus poverty arises sometimes from honourable causes, from the integrity of good men exciting the hatred and malice of the wicked.

Poverty also often springs from the contrary cause, from the personal vices of men. Many vices there are which have the closest connection with indigence, and naturally produce it, such as laziness, extravagance, and debauchery. Daily experience shews this, and assures us that the transition is easy from a gaming table to a jail,

jail, from the house of harlots to the house of correction, and from sloth to beggary. The holy Scriptures make the same observation, and use it as a prudential motive to caution men against such sins as draw after them the loss of every thing that is valuable even in this life.

Poverty also arises from what is called ill fortune, that is, from discouragements, disadvantages, and calamities, which the man himself did not contribute to produce. This is the case, when a person is born of needy parents who cannot provide for him, and put him forward in the world; when he loses his relations and friends in his infancy; when he is defrauded, injured, and oppressed by those who have more power or cunning than he can contend with. Thus also public calamities, war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, inundations, shipwrecks, fire, and other disasters, are an inexhaustible source of poverty, and the ruin of multitudes.

But farther; Not only nations are necessarily divided into rich and poor but there must be also a perpetual fluctuation of property, by which the rich become poor, and the poor become rich; so that neither state is of a fixed and permanent nature. Riches, says Solomon,

make themselves wings: they fly away as an eagle. Poverty also sometimes is a bird of passage, and takes her flight from those with whom she seemed to have taken up her abode.

Wealth by various means slips from the possessors, and gets from few into more hands, and then it is like a large river, which being cut into many channels, becomes a number of small rivulets.

But though in the common course of things it is easier for a rich person to become poor, than for a poor person to become rich, yet neither is this latter case so unfrequent. There are always instances of persons, who setting out with a very small income, either by their own ability and industry, or by sudden turns of fortune, become great and rich.

Not only all societies and communities consist of rich and poor, but it is farther to be observed that the poor will always be far more numerous than the rich. We see that it is so, and we know that it must be so. The revenues of a populous nation bear no proportion to the number of its inhabitants; the division therefore must needs be unequal. Besides, as it is easier to go down hill than up hill, so it is easier to spend money than to get it. Men's appetites

are

are keener than their abilities, and they can without much study find out various ways of gratifying their senses at the expence of their pockets, whilst they have little skill or inclination to pursue the true ways of thriving; and it is hardly conceivable how much is foolishly wasted even by people in narrow circumstances. Riches also and profitable stations being objects pursued by many, they must needs be often pursued in vain. Where the prizes are few, and the competitors numerous, the majority must come off with their labour for their pains. Moreover, though all men have nearly the same passions, they are far from having the same abilities, either for acquiring wealth and favour, or for transacting business, or for getting useful knowledge; they are also far from having the same advantageous opportunities; and so through internal impediments and external discouragements, the bulk of the people will be gradually upon the decline, till they settle amongst the lower class, and become only fit for bodily labour. But bodily labour hardly ever raised a fortune: at the most, it only secures from hunger and nakedness and beggary. A large income, if it be an acquired

one, must be acquired by the head rather than by the hands.

Thus it evidently appears that whilst there is human liberty, whilst there are virtues and vices, whilst there are vicissitudes of fortune, and revolutions of affairs, there must be in all times and places a mixture of high and low, of rich and poor. Providence permits it, and in some sense may be said to * appoint it, since it results from the nature and constitution of this world.

II. Now let us consider, secondly, the moral reflection made by Solomon upon this inequality. The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all. That is to say; They have one common Parent, whose providence extends over them all. In that respect they are equal. And if so, there should be no great difference, as to real happiness, between them.

It should be remembered that those accidents and natural evils must be thrown out of the question, which arise not properly from a state of poverty: for poverty and beggary are differ-

* See this subject very ingeniously discussed by Aristophanes *Plut.* in a dialogue between Chremylus and the Goddess Poverty, ver. 507, &c.

ent things, and we are considering the former, and not the latter.

Let us see then whether there be much disparity in point of happiness between the great and the small, the master and the servant, the gentleman and the labourer, the rich and the poor.

Shallow reasoners, and superficial observers of human nature and human life, will judge without hesitation that the rich have every advantage on their side. Wealth, say they, buys titles, procures high stations, opens the way to honour and to power, commands respect and submission, and either contains in itself every accomplishment, or which is as good, supplies the defect of every accomplishment. A rich man is above the world, able to say what he will, and to do what he will, and to pursue enjoyments that lie out of the reach of the vulgar.

Yet not much satisfaction can arise from all this. To have honour and authority, unless it be honestly acquired and decently supported, is to be raised to splendid infamy. Power wantonly exercised is the undesirable opportunity of doing mischief, for which a severe account is to be given in the next state, and not seldom in

the present state. Wealth used for vile purposes, or for no good purposes, can be no real blessing to the waster or to the hoarder of it. Independency rightly understood, is sometimes a blessing: but it is sometimes a curse and a calamity. He who cannot conduct himself, is safer when he is conducted by others; and a blind man would be mad, who should choose to shew his independency by refusing the necessary assistance of a guide. It is often an advantage to be in a state of dependence, as under a good parent, or a good master; and the days which are spent in that condition, are frequently the happiest days of our life. To do what we please, is a wretched privilege, when it enables us to do what we ought not. To follow pleasure that ends in disappointment and pain, is to court and invite misery, and to hasten it upon us; as if misery would not come too readily of her own accord, unearned, unfought, and unpursued! Solomon, who had wealth enough to know its nature, says, When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with the eyes? Thus far there seems to be no considerable advantage on the side of wealth.

The

The poor are, or they may be, more free from uneasiness than the rich. As they usually have fewer desires, fewer false and artificial wants, more moderate expectations, and more bounded views, they have fewer disputes, less anxiety, less sensibility of hardships, and cooler apprehensions of future events; and these sorts of cares and commotions are no small abatements of human happiness.

In point of health, the poor, I mean those who are poor and sober, have the superiority. Temperance, exercise, and labour, to which their income and their station seem to oblige them, prevent those diseases which indolence and luxury create: and in case of sickness, their remedies are simple, and easily obtained, especially in this country, where the humanity and liberality of the present age hath provided for them in various ways. Such objects, it is to be hoped, are seldom so far neglected, as to find no assistance.

The extremes either of plenty or of indigence usually occasion various distempers, and shorten the thread of human life. For too much indulgence in eating, drinking, clothing, sleeping, and other things, and on the contrary too much fatigue and hardship, attended with a
spare

spare and unwholesome diet, spoil the constitution, and are the underminers of health and strength. So that examples of a very long life are more commonly to be found amongst those who never were deprived of necessities, or accustomed to elegancies. They therefore who are in a middle state between wealth and want, should be thankful for their lot, and instead of envying those who are above them, should consider how many are placed beneath them.

In point of decent conveniences, it must be owned that the rich have the advantage, but yet how far such conveniences contribute to happiness is not clear, how far the conveniences, to which a man hath never been accustomed, are necessary to his well-being. If he feels not the want of them, they are to him in the list of superfluities.

The lower part of mankind have too frequently been querulous, envious of those who were better accommodated, and desirous either of rising to an equality with such persons, or of bringing them down to an equality with themselves. This may incline them to think that the levelling system would set all to rights.

But a more absurd and pernicious scheme cannot enter into the mind of man.

If the whole property and revenue of any country were equally divided amongst the inhabitants, they would be reduced to a state approaching very nearly to poverty. There would be an end of all liberal arts and sciences, of all learned education, of all public charities, of all extensive trade and commerce, of all encouragement to industry, of all national credit, and indeed of all civil government. And thus poverty, ignorance, ill manners, independency, and anarchy would overspread the land, and the inhabitants would be reduced to the most wretched state, accompanied with this reflection, that they had' brought it upon themselves, and suffered no more than they deserved.

Indeed such a state could not continue; for wealth and property will fluctuate: they are like the sea, which is never at rest, but always either ebbing or flowing. Power and wealth would by degrees return to some, and poverty to others. Men are not formed for a state of perfect equality and independency in this life. God hath made us for one another. Some are qualified to govern, others to obey; some

some to teach, others to learn; some to contrive, others to execute; some to labour with their head, others to labour with their hands; and the rich could no more subsist without the assistance of the poor, than the poor without the assistance of the rich.

The very manner in which we enter into this world shews that we are not equal in all respects, for then we ought all to be created in a state of manhood. But infancy is dependency, and we begin by being in subjection, and receive from others the improvements of body and mind. How high soever our station may be, we have obligations upon us of reverence, gratitude, and affection to those who took care of us in our younger years.

Let us now make some application of the present subject.

I mentioned to you before that though the extremes of over-abundant wealth and of indigence are too often to be found in this world, and though God may be said to permit whatsoever he doth not interpose to hinder, yet he doth not approve of either of these extremes. Reason and Revelation consider them as natural and moral disorders, which men should endeavour to remove.

Civil

S E R M O N VII. 141

Civil government is of human institution, and of divine approbation. God, having given us abilities and means to feed and clothe ourselves, doth not put meat into our mouths, and raiment upon our body, but leaves that to us. So, having given us understanding and reason, to discern the necessity of government and good order, he leaves us to form ourselves into societies, and to regulate them according to our common convenience. There is only one model of civil government of which God is the immediate author, and that is the Jewish Republic, as formed upon the Laws of Moses: and from those laws it manifestly appears that it was the will and design of God to guard that people against excessive riches and excessive want. These extremes his providence intended to prevent or remove, as far as providence can hinder them, without using such compulsion as would not suit with human nature, and would destroy the free agency of man.

The very same plan and design is contained in the Gospel; so that if all the inhabitants of a Christian nation were to live up exactly to the precepts of our Lord and the exhortations of his Apostles, excessive wealth and extreme indigence would hardly be found amongst them.

There

There are three precepts or laws of Christianity, which tend directly to remove these extremes; and they are the law of charity, the law of industry, and the law of temperance.

If the law of charity were universally observed, the rich would apply the superfluities of their wealth to the relief of the poor, the persons in a middle state would concur, and contribute their share in proportion, and thus multitudes would be assisted, and none would be left to perish for want, at least, none in peaceable and prosperous times.

If the law of industry were generally observed, the number of the necessitous would be considerably reduced, and laziness, which is one great cause of indigence, would be abolished.

If the law of temperance had the same due regard paid to it, persons in affluent or in tolerable circumstances would avoid foolish and needless expences, and would have the more to spare for those who are in want; and persons of a lower rank would not dissipate their slender fortunes by vain amusements, by dress, by gaming, by drunkenness, by lewdness, by endeavouring to ape their superiors in extensive follies and vices.

From

From the things which have been said, it is easy to collect the particular duties of the rich, and of the poor.

Liberality and a public spirit are properly the duties of the Great. In the days of our ancestors, and before the Reformation, Religion was in a very languishing condition, and the piety which subsisted was usually of the childish and superstitious kind. But though Christian knowledge and Christian virtues seemed to have taken their flight from the Christian world, one Virtue still remained, and that Virtue was Charity, or Liberality, charity well-intended, though too often misapplied. However, to that charity were owing Hospitals for the reception of the needy, public Schools for the education of youth, and Colleges in the Universities for their farther improvement.

The same charitable spirit, but more enlightened and better conducted, hath continued amongst us since the Reformation, and great additions have been made to the useful establishments above-mentioned.

As to the rich, they ought also to remember that in them cruelty and insolence towards the poor, is highly criminal. The Lord is the Maker of them all, says Solomon; and therefore,

fore, as he observes with a remarkable strength of expression, Whoſo mocketh the poor, reproacheth his Maker. God takes the inſult as committed directly againſt himſelf; and woe to the man who contendeth with his Creator!

We all enjoy one common nature, and ſo far we are all upon the ſame foot. Though there be an inequality of circumſtances, the original equality ſtill remains. Chriſtianity informs us alſo of another equality in a far more important point, an equal ſhare in the rights, privileges, promiſes and bleſſings of the Goſpel. The grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is like the ſun, which ſhines equally upon the palace and the cottage; it is like the dew of heaven, which refreshes the tall-eſt trees and the loweſt ſhrubs. In conſequence of this unbounded favour, the mean-eſt perſon upon earth may be a member of Chriſt, and a child of God, and ſhall be an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven in that day when he who exalteth himſelf ſhall be abaſed, and he who abaſeth himſelf ſhall be exalted.

Pride and wealth are too often connected together. Therefore ought the rich to be particularly careful to avoid this odious vice;
and

and they especially who are risen from a low to an high station. For such children of Fortune have frequently ten times more pride than other people; whether it be because they suspect that they are not sufficiently revered by those who were once their equals, or their superiors, or whether it be that few have a head strong enough to bear a sudden change from necessity to abundance, and from dependency to authority. But in fact, so it is, that amongst them you shall find the most glaring and shocking instances of vanity and arrogance.

As to the poor, they have various motives and obligations both to honest industry, and to patience and submission under their present condition. If, as Solomon says, God is the Maker of the poor as well as of the rich, he is consequently their father too, and their benefactor. Such a portion of happiness may usually be obtained by them as will make their present condition tolerable. But what are the sons of men, without exception? Strangers, sojourners, pilgrims, travellers. All temporal differences will cease for ever, when we come to our journey's end; and that end is near to many of us, and is not far from any of us.

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S E R M O N VIII.

PSALM. cxlv. 9.

*The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies
are over all his works.*

SINCE it is certain that we made not ourselves, and that the things about us are effects proceeding from some cause, there must be One upon whom all depend, and who himself depends upon none.

The magnificence and variety and beauty of the universe, the exact proportion of its parts, the decent order in which they are disposed, and the regularity of their several motions, proclaim the whole to be the work of one Creator, who is of himself without beginning or end, who formed it and gave it laws, who is every where present to govern and preserve it, who is most wise and most powerful, who is a pure mind,

separated from matter, and free from all perturbations, most perfect and most happy, and sufficient to his own happiness.

The consideration of this supreme wisdom and power and happiness which belong to the divine nature, would excite in us wonder and veneration and fear; but when to these attributes we join goodness, this most amiable quality seems to add new perfections to all the rest, represents God to us, not only as the absolute Lord, but as the kind Parent of all, and makes him the proper object of gratitude and reliance and love.

It is observable, that in the Gentile world, they who had tolerable notions of the supreme God, though in many things they erred concerning him, agreed in ascribing goodness to him, reckoned it the principal of his perfections, and called him* The Best and the Greatest: and indeed there are so many and so clear proofs of the divine goodness, that though some objections may be raised against it from the evil which is in the world, the evidence of it remains for ever superior, firm, and unshaken.

* In the Platonic Trinity, Ὁ Θεός stands above Νῦς; and Πνεῦμα.

Goodness is the same quality in all beings which have understanding, in God, in angels, and in men; it is and it must be the same in kind, differing only in degree. From the knowledge therefore which we have of goodness, as it is in men, we may frame to ourselves some knowledge of the goodness of God, removing from it all the defects which we observe in human goodness, and ascribing to it the utmost degree of perfection which we can conceive.

Now goodness in us is a disposition and an endeavour to promote the welfare and happiness of others; and from this notion of human goodness we may frame some conceptions of the divine goodness, and say that goodness in God is a disposition to bestow at all times and in all places upon all his creatures all the good, which, according to their several natures, they are capable of receiving, and which it is reasonable that he, as the wise governor and preserver of the whole, should bestow upon each individual.

That this perfection belongs to God, may be proved several ways.

1. That God is good appears from the necessary connection between goodness and other

divine perfections. God is supremely wise, and knoweth, beyond a possibility of mistaking, what is best and most beneficial for the whole; he is almighty, and able to execute his purposes; and possessing every thing in which happiness consists, he can be under no temptation to hurt and to oppress others.

2. The same truth also appears thus :

To suppose that God is not good, is to suppose him weaker and more imperfect and worse than the worst of his creatures.

In men, every sin in general, and in particular every sin against the rules of goodness, may be ascribed to the temptation of present profit or pleasure, to a power which the mind hath of fixing its thoughts entirely upon the object which it desires, and of overlooking the ill consequences arising from it, and in some measure to error and mistake. Thus a person who oppresses or defrauds others, is led into injustice by views of self-interest, by the urgent desire of gratifying a violent and favourite passion, and of finding present ease and convenience; and he is mistaken when he fancies that it is his interest to indulge a depraved inclination, or to obtain a worldly advantage by evil means, he is mistaken in this; for his loss must

must be far greater than his profit, and his pain than his pleasure. Swayed by these motives and deluded by these errors, a sinner acts, never choosing evil because it is evil, but because he thinks it agreeable for the present, and hopes that he shall not suffer for it hereafter. But God, if he were an evil being, would be disposed to evil neither by mistake, nor temptation, nor passion, nor advantage, and would choose evil purely as evil. And upon this absurd supposition, instead of the Best and Greatest, he would be the lowest and the meanest of all beings; for nothing can be great that is not good. Where there is no goodness, there must be darkness, confusion, disorder, and irregularity. Spite and hatred, malice and deceitfulness, revenge and cruelty cannot produce peace within, any more than without. A mind swayed by these dispositions must resemble a troubled sea, a whirlwind, a black and tempestuous sky; and a Deity of this kind must be continually* miser-

* A Deity exposed to trouble may well say;

Sed nocet esse Deum : præclusaque janua leti

Æternum nostros luctus extendit in ævum.

Ovid. Met. i. 662.

able, and even for his own sake must change his nature, if he could.

It is said, that there was even in very ancient times, a prevalent notion in many places of two Gods, the one perfectly good, the other as completely evil; the one the author of all the virtue and happiness, the other of all the sin and misery that is in the universe. This system is supposed to have been contrived to account for the rise and continuance of the natural and moral evil which is in the world. Now if there were two such principles, the consequence, one would think, must have been, that the good Deity would have overcome the bad one, or would have altered and amended him, having so many natural advantages over him, more wisdom, more prudence, more tranquillity and serenity, more extensive views, and a larger understanding.

But the absurd opinion of two co-equal Gods was perhaps never entertained, and the sentiments of these Ancients may have been in some measure misrepresented. They did indeed believe two principles, the one good and the other bad: but they thought that this evil Being, though he was not created of God, yet

was

was in all respects inferior to him, and subject to his control. And this wrong notion of two uncreated Powers seems to have been a corruption of an older opinion concerning an evil Dæmon, formed at first by the Creator of all things, and then degenerating from his former state, and remaining powerful indeed, but limited, and absolutely dependent upon his Maker. This opinion might arise not only from tradition, but from considering the evil that is in the world. According then to this old doctrine, God made all things good in their kind; but as all rational creatures are necessarily finite and imperfect, and free to choose and to act, some of them abused their liberty, and fell into vice, the chief and highest of which disobedient creatures is an evil Power, and the principal cause of sin, and of all evil. But, said they, the Almighty, who, for a time permits these disorders, so far interposes as frequently to lessen and restrain them, and often makes good to arise out of evil, and at length will cause all to terminate in good, will correct what is amiss, and abolish what is incorrigible, and then shall appear a new and a fair scene of uniformity, beauty, and perfection. In the mean while, the disorder

order lasts for what mortals call a long time, but a time which is nothing compared to eternity, and in the sight of Him, to whom a thousand years are as one day. In this opinion there is a great resemblance to the Jewish and Christian doctrines of the origin of evil, and of the Prince of disobedient Spirits.

The worship of the Devil, as of an evil Deity, is known to be common in some idolatrous and Pagan countries. And indeed some Christians have run into extremes concerning this evil being, called the Devil; and have been apt to ascribe to him more power over the minds of men than can possibly belong to him. These notions they have taken up, perhaps not without a view to excuse themselves for their own sins, by throwing them upon his prevalent temptations. Such persons ought to be reminded, that the almighty and gracious God suffers none to be led into irresistible temptations to offend, and that their own lusts are the most dangerous devils, whom yet by God's blessing and their own honest endeavours they may resist and subdue.

Thus likewise, as to witchcraft, forcery and possessions, how many things have been ascribed

to evil spirits which upon a more careful inspection, have been found to be knavery or distemper?

3. That God is good, appears also from the goodness which is seen in his creatures, in men. Goodness in this world is exercised in some degree by many, and is esteemed and commended by almost all. If this disposition be found in some measure in us, it must be most eminently in our Creator, from whom this and all other virtues must be derived. As without a Cause we could never have begun to be, as without a living, powerful, and wise Cause, we could never have had life and strength, reason and sagacity; so without a kind and good Cause we could never have had the affections of benignity and benevolence.

That God is good, is as certain as that he is the creator, author, father of all. He hath impressed upon his creatures a natural affection towards their issue. In men, who are rational beings, this affection extends itself not only to the offspring of their body, but to the offspring of their understanding. Whatsoever they have artfully contrived, ingeniously invented, judiciously observed, elegantly composed, and well executed, that they love perhaps not less than
sons

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sons and daughters. This universal passion to love what proceeds from us is manifestly necessary to promote and preserve the general good, and therefore is good and right in itself, when applied to proper objects, and guided by reason. The same disposition, but void of all weakness and imperfection, must be in our universal Parent, who is the Cause of us, and of all our innocent affections.

In the second book of Apocryphal Esdras, though a book of no sacred authority, there is a just and beautiful observation relating to our present subject. When Esdras laments the unhappy state of the Jews, and expostulates with God concerning it, the Angel gives him this gentle rebuke; “*Thou art sore troubled in mind for Israel’s sake. Lovest thou that people better than he that made them?” The same thought is thus expressed by the prophet Isaiah: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea they may forget; yet will I

* If this be, as it really is, a good observation; what he says in another place, cannot be good:

“O Lord, thou madest the world for our sakes. As for the other people, which also come of Adam, thou hast said that they are nothing, but be like unto spittle, and hast likened the abundance of them unto a drop that falleth from a vessel.” ch. vi. 55.

not

not forget thee." And thus by our Saviour:
 " If ye being evil know how to give good gifts
 to your children, how much more shall your
 Father who is in heaven give good things to
 them that ask him?" " Thou hast mercy upon
 all," says the Author of the Wisdom of Solo-
 mon, " for thou canst do all things, and winkest
 at the sins of men, because they should amend.
 For thou lovest all things that are, and abhor-
 rest nothing that thou hast made: for never
 wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou
 hadst hated it. And how could any thing have
 endured, if it had not been thy will? Or been
 preserved, if not called by thee? But thou sparest
 all: for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of
 souls."

It is the observation of a* great philosopher,
 that the artist loves the work of his hands
 better than his work would love him, if it were
 endued with sense and reason; and that the
 person, who confers a great benefit upon ano-
 ther, loves him whom he obliges better than
 the obliged person loves him. To which it
 may be added, that parents generally love their
 children more than they are beloved by them.

* Πᾶς τὸ οἰκεῖον ἔργον ἀγαπᾷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγαπηθεὶς αὐτὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔργου, ἡμψύχου
 γυναικός.

Aristot. Eth. Nic. ix.

And

And yet in all these instances, gratitude, one would think, should make the love of the inferior to be the strongest; but experience shews that it hath not this effect. These observations may be reduced to this general truth, that Love descends more than it ascends; and we may be permitted, I think, to apply this to God and to ourselves, and to say that our great and good Creator and Benefactor loves us far better than even the most dutiful of us love him.

4. The goodness of God appears in its effects, in the blessings which we receive from him.

That we enjoy much good and many conveniences, is a plain matter of fact. So evident it is, that no sect hath had the face to deny it. They of whom we have been speaking, who held two principles, the one good and the other evil, acknowledged that there was much good in the world, and ascribed it all to a wise and good Author; and the Atheists themselves, the disciples of Epicurus, though they found great fault with our system and condition, and made the disorders in it an objection to a God and a providence, yet sometimes were in a better mood, and received their good things with a silent sort of gratitude, like a swine at a trough, and sometimes proceeded farther, and
said

said that kind* Nature had given men few wants, and ample provisions, and had spread a decent table for her children, and that when a man had eaten and drank his portion, and spent his day of life, he ought to get up, and make room for others, and retire without murmuring, and with a good grace, and thank his Mother, who had entertained him so handsomely.

The goodness of God appears from the works of the creation.

God did not make us by necessity and constraint, because he is before all things, supreme and independent, and nothing from without could compel him. He made us not blindly and without design, because he hath perfect wisdom and knowledge. He made us not for any advantage which could accrue to him, because he must be self-sufficient, and possess in his own nature all things which happiness requires. He made us not because he wanted us to serve and praise him; for we cannot suppose his felicity to depend upon the opinion which we entertain of him, and the reverence which

* Denique si vocem rerum Natura repente Mittat, &c.

Lucretius, iii. 944. ii. 14. 995-

we pay to him; nor would he be less happy, though we passed over all his favours in stupid and ungrateful silence. It was therefore goodness in God which moved him to create.

Though it was fit that his goodness should display itself in the production of creatures, and in that sense it may perhaps be *morally* necessary that there should in all times be an inhabited world, yet instead of us he might have made other beings, who would have served his purposes as well. It is therefore a favour to each of us, that we are a living part of the great whole.

The gifts of a perfectly good author must needs be highly valuable, and worthy of that wise and beneficent Mind which bestows them. Such are those which God hath conferred upon us.

He hath placed us in a world abounding with all things useful and convenient for us, and agreeable to our nature and inclinations, which whilst they supply our wants and answer our desires, are perpetual proofs of his power and goodness, who contrived and disposed them for our benefit. His power and goodness present themselves to us in all the objects which surround us; they appear in the earth which feeds

feeds us, in the creatures which serve us, in the heavenly bodies which shine upon us, in the succession of day and night, in the change and regular return of seasons, in every thing that contributes to our satisfaction and well-being.

He hath created us many in number, that we might enjoy the pleasure and the profit of a social life, that we might assist, and comfort, and instruct, and protect each other. Hence arise those intercourses of good offices, those mutual dependencies, those several relations which we bear to others, whence we all reap numberless advantages.

He hath made us rational creatures, he hath given us an understanding which we can employ to so many noble and useful purposes, not only in the invention and improvement of the arts and sciences which civilize and adorn society, and add to the conveniencies and comforts of life, but in viewing and considering his works, and the wonders of his adorable providence, in searching into his excellencies and perfections, in inquiring into our own nature and powers, in discerning between truth and falsehood, good and evil, in discovering our

duty, and the reasonableness of those eternal and immutable laws by which we ought to be directed, and in perceiving the manifold advantages of piety and virtue.

This life, this reason and understanding which we enjoy, are upon the justest accounts dear and valuable to us; but to know that we had them only for a time would greatly lessen their value, or rather take it entirely away; for the thought that we must lose them would make us uneasy and unhappy even in the possession of them. We are in no danger of undergoing this loss: God, who hath given us a soul so excellent in its operations, and capable of advancing in knowledge and virtue in an endless progression, hath also given it an immortal nature, so that we shall continue for ever, and rejoice in our existence, if we use our sincere endeavours to deserve his favour by improvement in knowledge and goodness, and when we have offended, by amendment and renewed obedience.

The conditions which he requires of us are to practise virtue, that is, to live the life of reasonable creatures, to follow what by the nature of things, and by his appointment, tends

not

not only to the general good, but to our own advantage, to do what our own understanding and conscience recommend to us, and to love ourselves with a prudent affection.

God hath put it in our power to increase our agreeable sensations and reflections, and to diminish those which are disagreeable, to such a degree, that we may usually enjoy as much satisfaction as is suitable to our present state, if we use the proper methods to acquire it. In this respect man is the artificer of his own happiness, if he hath the wisdom to manage skillfully the materials which are put in his hands, if he takes care to cultivate his own understanding, to do good offices to others, to employ himself in useful and reputable occupations, and at proper intervals to pursue amusements which are obvious, cheap, and innocent, for these furnish the sincerest pleasure.

Such are the blessings which we receive from the most perfect Being, from him who stands not in need of us and of our service, and who would have been what he is, though we had never entered into the world.

Add to this, that since all men by wilful transgression depart, more or less, from their

duty, and have cause to fear the consequence of it, God by an act of mere goodness, as it is distinguished from justice, hath such compassion on us, and so loves us, that he hath given us his only-begotten Son, to take our nature upon him, to deliver us from sin and misery, to instruct us in our duty, and to open to us the way to eternal life.

Our Lord, in whom the goodness of God was manifested, came from heaven, freely to offer us the most important knowledge, the knowledge of God, of our own souls, and of our future condition, to deliver us from a state of doubt and fear, and to convince us of the truth of his doctrines, and of the certainty of his promises by fulfilling the prophecies concerning himself, by foretelling future events, and by working miracles.

As a lawgiver, he came to teach us our duty, and to deliver to us in a plain manner pure and reasonable precepts, the observance of which should be rewarded with a happiness surpassing all that we can hope and conceive.

As an example to incite us to the practice of virtue, he came to fulfil the laws of
God

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God by a perfect obedience, and by an entire resignation to the divine will under the greatest trials,

As a redeemer, he came to reconcile us to God, by suffering in our stead, and by submitting himself to afflictions and death for our sake.

As a mediator, he ascended into heaven, there to intercede for us, to obtain for us the remission of our sins, and the favour of God upon our repentance, and to give us the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

When we duly consider the dignity of our Saviour, and his condescension and sufferings, we cannot think that he could submit to all this, unless to produce some benefit unspeakably great, and we may justly suppose the advantages arising from it to be more extensive and more excellent than it hath perhaps been usually imagined. It is said in the New Testament, that the righteous at the resurrection shall be like to, or equal to the Angels, and that Christ shall change their bodies even unto the likeness of his own. Men therefore receive more from the second Adam than they lost by the first, and Christ hath

advanced human nature, by taking it upon him, to a greater glory and dignity than it had before. Thus is the divine goodness manifested in its effects.

5. Lastly; Another proof of the goodness of God is to be taken from the testimony of Scripture, where in several places mention is made of this attribute. Some of these passages have been already produced, to which I shall only add a few.

Our Saviour assures us that the goodness of God surpasseth the goodness of all his creatures in so eminent a manner, that it may be truly said, There is none good besides him.

When God makes his name known to Moses, he proclaims; The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Goodness is represented as the chief of God's perfections, as that in exerting which he takes the most pleasure. I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord. And St. John, in
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an expression stronger than all these, says; God is love.

These are the several proofs which we have of the goodness of God, from the joint force of which this important truth appears most evident and unquestionable. The objections to this truth should now be stated and considered; but that the time will not permit.

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S E R M O N IX.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

ALL religion, natural or revealed, and all our better hopes are founded upon the supposition that God is good; and as this is of all truths the most important, so there are many clear and strong proofs of it, and the joint force of them is irresistible. That part of the subject hath been considered.

There are indeed objections to the goodness of God, objections which appear difficult, and which perplex our weak understanding.

Some may think it most advisable for a Preacher to take no notice of them, and not to call forth doubts of that kind upon so fundamental a part of religion, nor to raise a formidable Apparition which perhaps he cannot lay. But it is to no purpose to think of shunning or stifling this inquiry. The objections are almost

as old as the sun and the moon, they have been made and repeated over and over, and every one who ever read, or who ever thought, must be acquainted with them more or less. To be afraid of looking them in the face, is in a manner to give up the best of causes as indefensible; and there is no occasion for such apprehensions, since Reason and Religion furnish us with sufficient answers. Let it not be forgotten that we have already proved and established the goodness of God, and that difficulties are of no weight against demonstrations.

Now the objections to the goodness of God are taken from the evil that is in the world, which may be comprised under these two sorts, the evil of sin, and the evil of pain.

The Pagans knew by continual experience, that a torrent of natural and moral evil had spread itself over the world, but were at a loss to assign its origin; like the ancient Egyptians, who had constant evidence of the overflowing of the Nile, but could not find out the spring and the head of it.

How far the evil of sin may have entered into other parts of the creation, we know not; but that its contagious influence hath overspread this earth, is too plain. As we are rational beings,

ings, we are able to discern between good and evil, right and wrong, and as we are free beings, we have a power of choosing the good and abstaining from the evil; but even the most upright of us make not the best use that we could of these abilities, and in many things we all offend; whilst the worst abandon themselves to wickedness and live in perpetual opposition to the laws of nature and to the will of God.

Besides which, we are informed by Revelation, that there are many beings, in order and nature superior to us, who corrupted themselves, and became evil spirits, and continue from the beginning of the world in a state of rebellion and obstinacy, and shall be found in the same hardened state, when our Lord comes to judgment.

Concerning the evil of pain, it must be confessed that the dominion of it is not less extensive than the dominion of sin. The frequent disorders of the elements causing general calamities, the wars which are continually carried on, to the destruction of millions, and to the distress of the greater part of mankind, the ill usage which men receive and return in all times and places, the bodily distempers to which they are subject, the distempers of the mind, which
are

are scarcely fewer in number than the former, the fears of death, and the necessity of undergoing it, all these have their seat in the lower world, and the pain which many suffer during the course of a calamitous life surpasseth the satisfaction which they enjoy.

Under the evil of pain is also to be ranked the effect of sin, which naturally and necessarily hurts the mind and the body; and the future punishment of sin, which God, as governor of the universe, hath declared that he will inflict.

Hence it is objected; God is either the author of all these evils, or at least he permits them. How can this be reconciled with his goodness, and how could they enter into a world created and ruled by a beneficent Lord, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works?

To this difficulty two general answers may be made, in which an humble and modest mind may acquiesce.

1. We are so incompetent judges of God's providence, that we ought not to charge him with want of goodness from those evils which we see and experience.

If

If things be made and governed by a good Being, we may conclude that the evil which is in the creation could not be prevented or removed, and that when it is compared with the good, it is so small, that it bears almost no proportion to it. But it is not strange that we should not be able to discover this from our own observation and knowledge of the course of things. We are inhabitants of an inconceivably small part of the world; we know at most the transactions of a few thousand years. In this little spot where we are placed for the present, we find much evil, and we know that it hath continued what we call a long time. What is this to the boundless universe, and to the ages of eternity? The object of God's providence is the whole world, and in it innumerable creatures. To all these the divine government extends, ordering all things in the wisest, in the justest, and in the kindest manner. But unless we could survey eternity and immensity, we cannot have a full view of this; and we must not pretend to say that there is a defect of goodness in the administration of the whole, from the consideration of that very little portion of it, which lies within the reach of our contemplation.

2. If

2. If this first answer be satisfactory, the second hath still more strength.

It is true that there are objections to the goodness of God, which have in them no small difficulty. But in all questions of this nature, it is the part of every prudent inquirer to consider the difficulties on both sides, and to embrace the opinion which hath the fewest. By this way of judging, the question before us is soon decided; for there are many unanswerable proofs of God's goodness, there are many absurdities which follow the denial of it; and the difficulties which attend it arise in all probability from our limited capacity, and imperfect knowledge, which cannot discover the whole plan and system of divine providence.

From these general answers let us now descend to a consideration of particulars.

It was an act worthy of our beneficent Author to create a variety of beings endued with reason, and capable of immortal happiness.

But a rational agent must be a free agent; for to reason and to act require and imply choice and liberty: and every created and free being, must have a power of sinning, unless he had the perfections of his Creator, which is impossible.

Thus

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Thus the evil of sin entered into the world in such a manner that it cannot be charged upon God, and prove any want of goodness in him.

If we consider the evil of pain as the consequence of sin, we must acknowledge that we are deservedly subject to it, and that beings who act perversely and unreasonably, ought to suffer for it.

The pain to which the good are liable, if it be to them an occasion of exercising many virtues, and of qualifying themselves for greater rewards in a better state, is profitable and desirable.

The pain to which the bad are exposed, if it may, as it certainly may, be useful to them, to reclaim them from sin, and to remind them to seek happiness where it is to be found, is also of great advantage; and if it have not this effect upon them, it is a punishment which they deserve.

Indeed, if we duly consider the thing, and take in all circumstances, from the very evil which is in the world, no slight arguments may be drawn to prove the goodness of God, since those evils have a tendency to produce such a variety of moral virtues and Christian

flian graces, and are alleviated by so many aids, and tempered and allayed with so many favours. Hence we may reason and infer; If God be so gentle even in his corrections, so kind even in his anger, how great must his goodness, his munificence, and his recompenses be? Of all evil the worst is sin; and yet if we had not sinned, * the clemency of God had not been manifested, nor would he have had those titles, in which he seems to glory; The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Sin is the occasion of repentance, and repentance produceth humility, distrust of ourselves, religious fear and caution, and when it ends in reformation, it is a powerful motive to affectionate gratitude towards God, according to our Saviour's remark, that he to whom much is forgiven, will love much; and at this happy change of one sinner, there is, as he also says, more joy in heaven, than over ninety

* Quid? quod et egregii dederim tibi muneris ansam,

Materies laudis dum mea culpa tuæ est.

Nam nisi peccassem, quid tu concedere posses?

Clementis nomen non habiturus eras.

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and nine just persons who need no repentance. Shall we then continue in sin, that grace may abound? By no means; for even long-suffering hath its limits, and patience itself may be provoked too far. But the consideration of the easy terms of reconciliation upon repentance and renewed obedience should teach us to adore the riches of the divine goodness, which thus out of the greatest evil brings forth good.

As to temporal inconveniencies and troubles, they are not only of a short duration, and a mere nothing compared to eternity, but, by God's appointment, they either produce desirable effects, or they are alleviated by many comforts, or they are compensated by many advantages. Labour, though it was at first inflicted as a curse, seems to be the gentlest of all punishments, and is fruitful of a thousand blessings: the same Providence which permits diseases, produces remedies; when it sends sorrows, it often sends friends and supporters; if it gives a scanty income, it gives good sense, and knowledge, and contentment, which love to dwell under homely roofs; with sickness come humility and repentance, and piety; and affliction and grace walk hand
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in hand. In general, the disagreeable events and the troubles incident to human life both wean us from an immoderate love of this world, and raise the hopes and desires to better objects, and soften the heart of man for the reception of the gentle affections, of affability, humanity, civility, pity, condescension, and officious kindness; and prevent or remove a certain narrow, selfish, and uncompassionate disposition, which often attends great health and a flow of prosperity.

The doctrine of future punishments, as it is contained in the Gospel, hath often and often been made an objection to the divine goodness, and to the truth of Christianity: and this objection hath unhappily received additional strength from the many injudicious and unsatisfactory replies which have been made to it; for when an argument is ill answered, it looks as if it were unanswerable. Yet it seems not hard to weaken all its force by the following suppositions, which are founded both in natural and in revealed religion.

There are, as we have shewed, many plain, direct, and undeniable proofs of God's goodness. Now clear truths are never to be forsaken and given up on account of difficulties; and we

ought rather to conclude that those difficulties would vanish, if we had a more comprehensive view of things.

2. The punishment of sin is not to be accounted an act of arbitrary power, proceeding merely from divine appointment; for in all government correction is absolutely necessary, for the reformation of offenders, or for the good of the whole. And besides this, such is the nature, and such the effects of vice, that it must be its own punishment, it must make an alteration for the worse in all the powers of the mind, and it must be attended with the loss of many pleasures which are as naturally produced by virtue.

3. We are told that God hath committed all judgment to his Son, to him who loved us, and died for us, and who cannot be supposed to join no clemency to justice.

4. We know also both from reason and revelation, that the recompenses and the punishments of the age to come shall be and must be infinitely various, and proportionable to the good and to the bad actions and qualities of men.

5. We are told likewise, that when judgment shall be pronounced, every mouth shall

be stopped, stopped not by outward violence, but by inward conviction. All nature shall assent to the equity of the sentence, and it shall be impossible to make any rational objection to it.

In matters of mere favour, God will not be accountable to his creatures. It is their duty to be thankful for the portion which they receive, and not querulous for that which they receive not. If a man should say to his Creator, Why didst thou subject me to the law of mortality? Why didst thou not make me an angel? The answer is; Nay but O man, who art thou that contendest against God? Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? But in matters of justice and equity, God in the Scriptures, as we may say, seems to lay aside his privilege, as Creator; he appeals to heaven and earth, and to the common notions of men, and condescends even to make them his judges, and calls upon them to produce their reasons, and to make their objections.

6. Lastly, the doctrine of the future state of retribution is usually delivered in figurative expressions, which of course are somewhat ob-

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secure and ambiguous, and it is of the same nature as prophecy, which is never fully understood till the event explains it. So we must wait for the event, before we can form a sure judgment concerning it; and in the mean time objections must be unreasonable, and may be rejected as such. Of the state of rewards it is said, that it doth not yet appear what it shall be; the same holds true concerning the state of punishment; it doth not yet appear what it shall be. Sufficient it is for us to know that it shall be as God thinks fit, and that God is good and gracious. But there is one thing which Christians ought never to forget, namely, that of those to whom much is given, the more will be required, and that they who knew the will of their Lord, and did it not, shall receive many stripes.

Another objection to God's goodness is raised from the doctrine of absolute reprobation, that is, of a decree, by which the greater part of mankind are doomed first to sin, and then to eternal misery; whilst a few elected persons are as unavoidably impelled to righteousness, or have the righteousness of Christ graciously imputed to them, and shall be crowned with glory and happiness. So the former are de-

livered up to cruel fate and unrelenting necessity : the latter are favourites of heaven, and God hath fixed his affection on their very persons, without any regard to their moral qualifications. And, indeed, when we consider them with respect to their abilities and their social qualities, they seem usually to have nothing about them of a very engaging or endearing nature.

Now this strange doctrine, which is fathered upon Christianity, stands upon no other foundation than a few misinterpreted texts of Scripture, and they who believe it ought also to believe that goodness in God is an unknown and incomprehensible quality ; for such a method of government differs from our notions of goodness as much as darkness from light. Such a system as this seems calculated to produce a religion narrow, contracted, gloomy, sour, and unbenevolent, a religion from which reason is discarded, to make room for enthusiasm, a religion which fills the mind either with a bold security, or with cruel despondence and despair, according to the different tempers that it meets with.

Another objection to the divine goodness is taken from a supposed defect in Christianity,
namely,

namely, want of universality. Many ages were past, before the Gospel was revealed, and it hath been revealed, comparatively speaking, to a few.

The answer to this is contained in an observation, which we made before, that in matters of favour God is not accountable to his creatures. It is sufficient, if he hath placed every one in such a condition, and given him such powers and opportunities, that he may perform what is required of him, and so live, that when he departs hence, he may enter into a better state than that which he hath left.

Much of the same kind is this objection also, that the greater part of men have been involved in darkness and uncertainty as to their future state, that nothing concerning it was made known to the Gentiles, and very little to the Jews.

This is not altogether true, for reason suggests many good arguments in behalf of a future state, and the most ancient traditions are all in favour of it. Many things also are recorded in the Old Testament, which plainly lead to a belief of it. Men are naturally disposed to desire it, and therefore they are naturally

turally disposed to think that those innocent desires will not be disappointed: and this doctrine hath been entertained in all times and places, though not without some degree of doubt and hesitation. But supposing that it was not fully cleared up before the Gospel was revealed, yet if good men knew it as soon as this short life was over, and had the agreeable *surprise to find a glorious scene exceeding all their hopes, this would surely be enough to clear and justify the conduct of Providence towards them.

Another objection to the divine goodness is made from the sufferings of the brute creation. The† beasts commit no sin, and yet endure much misery. As for us, it must be owned, that most of the evils to which we are exposed, are no more than we deserve upon many accounts: but as to the inferior animals, mankind might say of them, in the words of David, when the people died for his folly;

* — — — Illic, postquam se lumine vero
Implevit, stellasque vagas miratus, et astra
Fixa polis, vidit, quanta sub nocte jaceret
Nostra dies.

Lucan. ix. 11.

† Quid meruistis, oves, placidum pecus, &c.

Ovid. Met. xv. 116.

Lo

Lo I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done?

This must be acknowledged to be no small *difficulty; and the Scripture is, in a manner,

* It must be confessed that the empire of Death, which is established here over man and beast, appears as a defect and blot in our system. Every creature here subsists by the destruction of other creatures. If we were to form an imaginary world of beauty and happiness, there should be nothing in it subject to this cruel law, there should be, as the Revelation expresses it, no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain.

The Pythagoreans, who held the transmigration of souls, thought it unlawful to feed upon animals, and to dislodge the souls of their ancestors which were put into the bodies of brutes. But they might easily have perceived, that it was on many accounts absolutely impossible to observe this precept. The ox kills as many creatures for his subsistence, as the lion and the tiger; and a Pythagorean, who had made a meal upon vegetables, and drank water, or milk, or wine, or vinegar, slew his ten thousands at his dinner.

The Cartesians, to remove the difficulty, have affirmed, that beasts are mere machines, void of sense. But all the phenomena are against them, and their notion must always appear as extravagant as any Stoical paradox.

What if we should suppose, that the souls of brutes are spirits, who have misbehaved themselves in a former state, and are imprisoned in those bodies, by way of punishment? You will say, perhaps, that punishment ought to be attended with a consciousness in the intelligent agent, that he suffers for past transgressions. But how do you know that they have not this knowledge? And supposing that they have it not at present, yet they may in another removal to another state retrieve their consciousness and reminiscence.

I dare not lay much stress upon this solution, which I suppose will appear fantastical to many. I shall only say of it, that it is far better than the Cartesian hypothesis.

silent

silent upon the subject ; only it tells us, in general, that they are objects of God's providence, and that the same hand that feedeth us, feedeth them also. Solomon says, A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast ; whence it is fair to conclude, that if a righteous man is good towards them, much more is God ; for they are the work of his hands, not of ours. It is therefore not at all unreasonable to suppose, that as they have in them a living immaterial principle, which all their actions shew, when they die, he who made them can dispose of them in various ways, of which we have no notion, which may prove greatly to their advantage, and be an ample compensation to them for all that they have undergone. In the mean time they enjoy the good which falls to their lot without an uneasy recollection of things past, or a painful apprehension of things to come.

The œconomy of divine Providence with relation to these inferior creatures, is in a great measure hidden from us. We know not all the reasons for which they are called into being, and placed in this humble situation. We know not all the purposes for which they serve. We know not for what future ends they

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they may be designed. Therefore we must not make objections to the goodness of God, from his dealings towards them, since such objections may be only the result of our own ignorance.

Whilst we thus endeavour to vindicate the goodness of God, we must take care not to entertain false notions of it.

Because God is incomprehensible, some have concluded that we can frame to ourselves no conceptions of his moral perfections, that they differ from human virtues not only in degree, but in nature; that therefore goodness in God is a quality which quite surpasses our apprehension. It is no wonder that profane persons are fond of this notion, which suits very well with their inclinations; but it is strange that the serious and the religious should ever adopt it. For see what absurd consequences follow: it follows that, when we worship God, we worship we know not what; and that we worship him, we know not why; and that we have no reason to love him, to reverence him, and to put our trust in him; but too many reasons to fear him.

Because God is perfectly good and merciful, therefore sinners would willingly suppose that
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he will not punish. They think that God cannot be angry, and so far they think right: but thence they injudiciously conclude that he cannot punish. Now, because he is not only wise, but incapable of anger and of human passions and perturbations, for that very reason he is the only Being, who is capable of punishing without error or excess, and of administering impartial justice. God is good, but he is just and wise; therefore we must not explain one perfection, so as to overturn the rest, but observe, that the goodness of God is regulated by wisdom and justice, as his wisdom and justice are tempered with mercy and goodness. This indeed seems evident, that an all-wise and good Mind never punisheth for the sake of punishing, for revenge, but for the good of his creatures, and for the advantage of the whole.

Let us conclude with a plain and practical inference. Since God is so good to us, we ought in return to love him.

We find many motives to love him from a general consideration of his goodness to mankind made manifest in the works of creation and redemption. We shall find farther incitements to it, if we enter each into our own hearts, and reflect upon his kindness to us
through

through the whole course of our lives, who hath protected us from many dangers, which we could not foresee, or knew not how to avoid, who hath heard us in the day of trouble, when we fled to him, and had no other helper, who continues to give us opportunities to serve him, and to repent of our faults, and to work out our salvation, and shews us so much patience and forbearance, so much favour and mercy, when we perhaps have been guilty of so many neglects and transgressions, and have made him so unworthy returns for all his benefits. And yet he is good to us, he supplies our wants, he spares us, and invites us to come to him, and offers us pardon and peace.

Man, of all creatures which fall within the compass of our knowledge, hath had the greatest experience of the mercy of God; and if he loves him not, is guilty of ingratitude loaded with every aggravating circumstance.

That we may avoid this crime, let us not suffer those things to be in any degree dear to us, which God hath forbidden us to love, and which are not worthy even of the slightest approbation and the coldest desire. Let us not give too great a share of our affections to those things which he hath permitted us to enjoy;
let

let us not throw away our hearts upon fleeting objects, nor indulge an unhappy fondness for them, which always gives more pain than pleasure. It is highly reasonable that the first place in our mind be reserved for Him, to whom alone we owe all things, and to whom we can make no other return.

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JEREMIAH, xxiii. 23, 24.

Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

IN these words are set forth three divine perfections, to expose the folly of those wicked men who thought, or who acted as if they thought that they could sin securely, and that God had no knowledge, and took no notice of their ways. God therefore, by the mouth of his Prophet, declares that he is present in all places: Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. He declares that no transactions can escape his inspection: Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not

not see him? saith the Lord. These two perfections are mentioned expressly. A third is plainly implied, namely, his irresistible power; for if a sinner, who thinks to conceal himself from his Maker, is not only mistaken, but pursues his own ruin, the reason is, because God, who is present every where, and who beholds every thing, hath also a power to deal with every one as his wisdom shall direct him. His presence is infinite, his knowledge is unlimited, and his power is irresistible.

There are three ways of discoursing upon the perfections of God.

In the first way we prove that there is a God, and that he must have these powers and qualities which we ascribe to him.

It were to be wished that men not only believed in God, but believed in him upon good grounds, that they were able to give a reason of this their faith, and in no danger of being seduced by the cavils of profane persons. And therefore discourses which may furnish them with this kind of knowledge cannot be improper and unnecessary.

The second way of considering the divine attributes is, when supposing that God is, and

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that he possesses all perfections, we explain them as far as the sublimity of the incomprehensible subject permits, and confute the wrong opinions which have been entertained concerning them. Many mean conceptions, many false doctrines, many pernicious errors have prevailed concerning the nature and the perfections of God; and what hath been, may be again: for which reason, it is expedient to caution men that they fall not into the like mistakes, and by shewing them what follies and absurdities the human understanding is capable of embracing, to make them industrious in cultivating their own, and thankful for the light which the Gospel has given in this and all other moral subjects. There are also always persons who want instruction or admonition upon this head. Through ignorance, superstition, prejudice, or vicious dispositions, they receive and retain wrong notions of the nature of God, particularly of his goodness, mercy, and justice. Some suppose that he is partial, and a respecter of persons, and dread him with a slavish terror, as a cruel and inexorable master; whilst others think that his clemency will not permit him to be of-

fended at sin, or to punish it, or that he may be appeased by easier methods than amendment of life.

There is a third way of discoursing upon this subject, in which, supposing that they to whom we address ourselves have just and honourable notions of all God's perfections, and confining ourselves chiefly to practical truths, we shew them the effects which such a belief and such a knowledge ought to produce, and endeavour to excite in them a behaviour suitable to their faith. This is the important point, this is the end to which all our knowledge ought to be directed.

In each of these ways I propose to consider the doctrine contained in the text.

I. I shall therefore, first, endeavour to prove and represent, as briefly and clearly as the subject permits, God's omnipresence, his unlimited knowledge, and his irresistible power:

II. And, secondly, shew the effects which these truths ought to produce in us.

I. God is present every where.

A proof of this may be taken from the creation. Of all that we behold, there is nothing that could make itself, and make itself for wise ends and purposes. The sun, moon, and
stars,

stars, the heavens and the earth, the land and the waters, could not * consult together, and come to an agreement to contribute each of them what was necessary for the common good of the whole. Chance or Fate could not perform this, they are mere nothings, and words without a meaning. The world is plainly the offspring of one great and wise mind, which produced it, and disposed all its parts in that beautiful order in which they continue, and gave them those regular motions which they preserve, and by which they are preserved. Now God must of necessity be present with the things that he made and governs: therefore in him we live and move and have our being, he fills heaven and earth, he fills the universe of which we can discern no end, and which perhaps hath no bounds.

This proof of God's omnipresence is the easiest to be understood, and is sufficient for religious purposes, as it shews that wheresoever any being is, or can be supposed to be, there

* Nam certe neque consilio primordia rerum
Ordine se quæque, atque sagaci mente locarunt,
Nec quos quæque darent motus pepigere profecto.

Lucretius, i. 1020.

So far he talks very well.

also God is. There are other arguments to shew that God must be infinite and unlimited, which I shall not now mention.

Concerning the manner how God is present every where, we cannot possibly form to ourselves any clear notion.

Our conceptions of God can only be collected from his works, from ourselves, and from the things about us. The things about us, which discover themselves to our senses, cannot help us to conceive any thing concerning the divine presence, because God is a spirit, and no object of our senses. Nor will the acquaintance which we have with ourselves teach us to know how God is present every where, because we are in some measure strangers even at home. We are sensible that we have souls, which think and act, and are present where they think and act; yet the manner in which they are present is unknown to themselves.

It is vain to attempt what is unsearchable: all that we can do is to avoid mean and false notions concerning the presence of God.

We must not imagine that he hath any parts or shape, or is present in a bodily manner.

We

We must not imagine that he is more present in one place than in another. When any thing of this kind is said in Scripture, the meaning is, that extraordinary manifestations of his glory were there made.

Nor must we imagine that God is present in the same manner that human souls and other finite spirits are present. God is every where in a manner entirely different: he acts upon every thing as far as he thinks proper; but none of his creatures act upon him, produce any alteration in him, or make him more or less happy.

The justest notion therefore which we can form of God's omnipresence is this, that he is present every where in knowledge and in power.

He is present every where in knowledge. His knowledge is perfect, incapable of increase or diminution, and free from all the defects observable in the human understanding. Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.

This perfection is united with the former; for if God be every where, every thing must be known to him. It appears from the whole creation, which proclaims the wisdom of

its author and governor ; and it is proved from that degree of understanding which God hath conferred upon us. From him this and all other gifts proceed. He therefore must possess them in a most eminent manner. But the knowledge of God, as it relates to us, is a subject which more particularly requires our notice. Not only all our actions are known to him, but the motives upon which we act, and the ends which we propose to ourselves in acting, the disposition of our minds, our secret thoughts and hidden designs. By this perfection God, the judge of all creatures, is enabled to dispense rewards and punishments in an exact proportion to their behaviour. Nor do the hearts of men only lie open to the divine knowledge, but even their future actions. Hence arises a perplexing question, how the foreknowledge of God can be consistent with the liberty of action in men ?

It is certain that God foresees the future actions of men ; and it is equally certain that men are free beings. The difficulty therefore of reconciling these things should be ascribed to the imperfection of our limited understandings, and to the incomprehensible nature of God.

That all future events are known to God, is a doctrine of revealed religion. It appears from the many prophecies in Scripture concerning the good and evil actions of men.

That we are free beings is evident both from reason and from revelation. Freedom is a power which we have to do a thing or not to do it, from the time when we begin to think about it, till the time when we perform it.

We cannot indeed give a proof of this freedom by our actions, because we cannot do a thing and not do it at the same time.

But we have an inward sense, a strong and clear assurance of an inherent natural power to refrain from it, or to do the contrary. We perceive plainly that we are masters of our behaviour, that when a choice of two things is proposed to us, we can choose the one or the other. So plainly do we perceive this, that either we are free, or our nature is such that we are continually and unavoidably deceived and deluded, which we know not how to reconcile with the wisdom and goodness of our Creator.

And as we perceive that we are at liberty to act wisely or wickedly, so we judge like free beings of our past actions, and acquit or con-

demn ourselves in our own thoughts. Hence arise approbation of mind, or reproaches of conscience, as we find our conduct to have been reasonable and profitable, or absurd and pernicious. This natural and irresistible inclination to blame or to approve ourselves would be very improper, if we were over-ruled in all things by a fatal necessity, in which case we could really do neither good nor evil, but both would be done in us and for us by a superior compulsive power.

Lastly, the Scriptures every where treat us as if we were free beings, and agree with our reason in assuring us that we are accountable to God for our actions.

We cannot indeed conceive how God foresees things which depend upon our own choice, which we may either do or let alone: but one thing we can easily conceive and certainly know, namely, that finite capacities cannot comprehend the extent and the several ways of infinite knowledge.

Notwithstanding the difficulty, which no thinking man can overlook, of reconciling foreknowledge and liberty, yet it is very observable that men from the remotest antiquity believed them both, accounted themselves to be

be free agents, and thought that the Deity knew the future actions of men; and hence arose the various kinds of divination, or collecting future events from some indications given by the Deity. This is evident in the oldest *Pagan writer whose works are extant, and who plainly admits both these doctrines; and this prevalent opinion of the divine foreknowledge did not arise from reasonings upon the divine perfections, but from ancient † traditions of divine revelations and predictions.

God is also present every where in power. He is the only independent being, he is before all things, he made all things, he upholds and governs all things, from him all powers are derived, and therefore nothing is able to resist or defeat his will.

We cannot easily fall into wrong notions concerning God's supreme and irresistible power, if we remember that the power of God is, first, a power of doing all that is consistent with the nature of things, that is, which are possible; and secondly, a power of doing all that is consistent with his own nature and perfec-

* Homer.

† Vetus opinio usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, &c.

Cicero De Divin. i. 1.
tions,

tions, or all that is fit, reasonable, just, wise, and good.

If the Scriptures any where represent God as acting by no other rule than his own will and pleasure, with absolute authority, like the potter who fashions the clay into this or that shape, it is to be observed that matters of mere gift and favour are there represented, in which justice and equity are not concerned, and for which there can be no other rule than the will of the giver. Thus, that a person should be a native of this or that country, born in this or that age, that he should receive more or less power, knowledge, abilities, wealth and health, this is to be resolved into the mere good pleasure of God, who doth what he will with his own, not indeed without sufficient reasons, but for reasons which it is not necessary or fit that we should know. But it is not so in matters where justice and equity are concerned.

There are many passages in the Scriptures, where God with a wonderful condescension submits these his actions to be tried by men, and makes his own creatures his judges; shewing that mere might is not the foundation of his proceedings, and appealing to the everlasting

ing difference of right and wrong, which are discoverable by all rational beings.

These seem to be the clearest notions which we can form to ourselves concerning God's unlimited presence, his perfect knowledge, and his irresistible power. It is certain that the best representation which we can make of the divine perfection is very incomplete: but though we know not God as he is, we know so much of him as may give us peace, and contentment, and resignation, and reliance, and faith, and hope, as may deter us from sin, excite us to virtue, and guide us to immortality.

II. Let us therefore, now, consider what effects the fore-mentioned truths should produce in us, and what uses we ought to make of the doctrine that God is present every where in power and knowledge.

I. We should endeavour to resemble God in these perfections, and in the manner in which he exerciseth them. We are the offspring of God; we are his children, by nature, as men; by adoption, as Christians. The relation of father and son always supposes a resemblance, perhaps a very faint and remote likeness, but yet some kind of likeness. Let us then see
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how far we can, and in what manner we should imitate the power of God.

God hath conferred upon us several powers. As we are men, we have dominion over the inferior creation; as we are members of civil society, and thereby governors, or fathers, or masters, or teachers, we possess different degrees of authority; again, as we surpass others in wealth, strength, wisdom, knowledge, experience, sagacity, we usually acquire power over them. It is therefore our duty in the exercise of these powers to set God before us, and to take example from him.

The power of God is supreme, boundless, and irresistible; but his right of dominion over us and all other beings ariseth not thence. He is not therefore our lawful Ruler because he is strong and we are weak; but first, because he is our Creator who hath conferred upon us all that we possess, all that we are, and therefore in gratitude we are bound to obey him; and secondly, because he is most wise and good, and always doth and requires that to be done which is most beneficial for us, and therefore in prudence we are bound to obey him.

Most amiable and venerable is such a power, a power from which no evil is to be feared, and

every

every thing desirable is to be hoped and expected by every creature that acts suitably to the station in which it is placed.

From this manner in which God governs the world, we may learn how to use those small degrees of dominion and authority which he hath committed to us, namely in doing good and restraining evil, without prejudice and partiality, without pride and insolence, in shewing mercy and clemency to all, to the very brutes, much more to men, who if our inferiors in some things, in many respects are our equals, and in some perhaps our superiors. Tyranny and oppression is an intolerable and detestable abuse of authority. We ought neither to be guilty of it ourselves, nor to flatter or excuse it in others; for God forbids and abhors it, and will certainly punish it: he hath given no person licence to sin, nor can he be supposed to confer upon weak and wicked men a power which he does not, which he cannot exercise himself.

As the power, so also the knowledge of God is a perfection which we should endeavour to imitate, by acquiring as much of it as our abilities and opportunities permit. Man is made to honour, love and serve God; but that
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he may be disposed to this, he should be acquainted with his obligations to him, with the nature and extent of his duty, and with the perfections of his Maker, as far as they are discoverable by reason, or revealed in the Scriptures. These things require a skill which cannot be obtained unless we love truth, and spend part of our time in pursuit of it.

2. The consideration that God is present every where in knowledge and in power, should deter us from sin.

It is a sublime description which the Psalmist gives us of God's presence, knowledge, and power. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in the grave, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light to thee are both alike.

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An ancient * philosopher, who hath been generally and deservedly esteemed, hath fallen almost into the same thoughts and words; which shews that † *exalted minds have a singular sagacity in the discovering of truth.* He observes that the wicked shall not go unpunished, and adds, “ ‡ Boast not thyself, how fortunate soever thou mayst be, that thou shalt escape the divine Justice. Overlooked by her thou canst not be, no not though, small as thou art, thou shouldst descend into the depths of the earth, or though raised on high thou shouldst fly up into heaven.”

Man, as he is a rational creature, is able if he makes a right use of his understanding, to discern his obligations to serve God, and to perceive that God requires of him only what is just and equitable. As he hath by nature affections of love and gratitude, when he duly considers what God hath done for him, he will be inclined to make him suitable returns; and as he hath strong desires of happiness and immortality, when he reflects upon the rewards of

* Plato.

† Clemens Alexandrinus says somewhere, speaking of Plato, Αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις καὶ γυμναὶ παθῶν εὐστοχῶσί πως περὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν.

‡ De Legibus, x.

righteousness

righteousness with any serious attention, he must wish that he may partake of them. One might therefore at first imagine that man, who hath these abilities and inclinations, might be led to his duty by the gentler and nobler motives of persuasion, by the still voice of reason, by love and gratitude, and by the honourable hopes of rising again to a more excellent state, and of approaching nearer to his Maker. But it is not so. In man there is a mixture of the angel and the brute, of good and bad, of dignity and meanness, of worthy resolutions and of base dispositions; and the very best of us at particular times, and under particular temptations, stand in need of all kind of motives and helps to keep us from falling. The fear of punishment, though a less ingenuous, yet is often a necessary and an efficacious motive to amendment or to perseverance in righteousness.

We ought therefore frequently to call to mind those very plain and obvious, but very awful and terrible truths contained in the words of the text. Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? God is every where present in knowledge;

knowledge; to his view lie exposed all our follies and iniquities, those which we misrepresent and falsely call weakneses and natural infirmities, those which we have forgotten, those of which we are ashamed, which we would conceal from the world, and if it were possible, from ourselves. God is every where present in power. If we offend him, he is able to punish us, and that punishment shall begin as soon, and last as long, and lie as heavy as he shall determine and appoint. We cannot avoid him; we live and move in him; he is present within us and without us, and there * is no way to escape him but by flying to him. He can make all the objects with which we are surrounded, conspire to disquiet and afflict us; he can make us our own tormentors; he can let loose upon us innumerable evils which we have never yet felt, and of which we have no notion. What a restraint ought this to lay upon us! and how careful should it make us not to incur his displeasure! These are truths with which we are all perfectly well acquainted, and which for that reason ought to be frequently recommended to our consideration; for so it is that the things which are most

* Ut Deum evadas, fugias ad eum. *Augustinus.*

familiar to us often escape our notice, and are least regarded by us.

3. The consideration of the knowledge and power of God should teach us humility.

We possess, as was before observed, certain degrees of power and knowledge, which are various in various persons, and in which some surpass others. On account of those advantages, when they fall to our share, we are too much disposed to entertain a foolish and conceited esteem of ourselves, together with a contempt of our inferiors. They who thus misbehave themselves may be truly said, as the Scripture speaks, not to set God before their eyes. Pride is a very unfit companion for poverty and dependence, and vain men should remember that they receive all from God, and that they can acquire and preserve neither strength nor skill, unless by his blessing, by his appointment or permission. They should also remember that human knowledge at the best is mere ignorance, and human power mere weakness, when compared with these perfections, as they are in the divine nature.

4. Lastly, if we use our best endeavours to serve God, the consideration that he is present every where in knowledge and power is a particular

ticular encouragement to reliance and contentment, to faith and hope.

We are exposed to many evils and troubles; but he knows what they are, and how far we are able to bear them; and can and will lessen or remove them, or which is the same thing, strengthen and uphold us under them. We are surrounded with enemies, with evil spirits, and with men not less evil than they; but he who hath set bounds to the raging sea which it cannot pass, hath also limited the malice of perverse beings, and will protect those from all their adversaries who place their trust in him.

Our wants are daily returning upon us, and neither our own skill and industry, nor the favour of the world can secure to us those things of which we stand in need. Thus are we indigent and dependent creatures; but by depending upon the Almighty we partake in some sort of his self-sufficient nature; we enter into the possession of all things needful, by casting our cares upon his supreme goodness, wisdom and power.

We are perhaps in a low condition; poverty and obscurity is our portion; consequently it is not in our power to do much service to man-

kind, our upright and honourable inclinations are concealed from the world. But they are seen of God, who will recompense not only our good deeds, but those good desires and intentions which for want of opportunity and ability we could not put in execution.

We are placed in a state where we must not expect satisfaction and happiness from the objects which are about us, from any created beings. God alone can give us as much of it as is expedient for us in this life. From him we must seek it, and in his presence we shall find it.

Present he is to us all, as creator, ruler, and preserver; but there is another kind of divine presence mentioned in Scripture, of which our Saviour thus speaks; If a man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Blessed is he who can secure to himself this inestimable treasure; whatsoever his condition be, his heart will rejoice, and his joy no one can take from him.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XI.

JAMES i. 17.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

BEFORE we explain these words, it will be requisite to shew the connection which they have with the foregoing part of the chapter. All the inconveniences and persecutions which Christians undergo for the sake of religion are, as St. James observes, temptations or trials of their faith and virtue, which God permits or appoints for their improvement, which he enables them to bear, and for which, if they be patiently endured, he rewards the sufferers a thousand fold. If any man, being overcome by these temptations, misbehaves himself, the fault, says the Apostle, is to be ascribed neither to the temptation itself, as if it were irresistible; nor to God, as if he placed any one, or suffered

ferred him to be placed under a necessity of sinning; but it is to be ascribed to the man himself, to his own wicked heart, to his own folly and iniquity. God is the author of no moral evil; God is good, he is unchangeably good, he is the perpetual author of good, and he gives all necessary assistance to those who seek it sincerely and qualify themselves to receive it.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father.

This seems to allude to the words of our Saviour: If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? An earthly parent, how bad soever he may be in other respects, will scarcely refuse a piece of bread to his own child, or give him poison instead of food. Much less will our heavenly Father give us any thing that is in itself pernicious, or deny us any thing that is absolutely necessary, if we humbly and piously apply ourselves to him.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

St.

S E R M O N XI. 215

St. James calls God, the Father of lights, in which expression God is compared to the sun, as to an object which best resembles its great Creator; for the Sun is in some manner the Eye, and the Soul, and the Ruler of the world, who liberally and impartially and universally dispenses his kind and fruitful influences of light and heat; but these influences are subject to many variations. Sometimes he is eclipsed, and his light is turned to darkness; and sometimes clouds interpose and deprive us of his presence: he rises, and he sets; he approaches nearer, and then he turns away and retires from us. God is a Sun who never rises and sets, who hath no changes and variations, of whose kind influences no creature can deprive us, who is an everlasting spring of spiritual light, and an inexhausted fountain of good.

These words thus explained are a lively representation of God's unchangeable nature; upon which I shall discourse in the following order:

I. I shall consider God, as he is unchangeable in his own nature and perfections:

II. I shall consider him in his dealings with us, as he is our governor; and shew that he is

unchangeable in his will, his purposes, and decrees :

III. I shall consider those actions and that behaviour of God towards mankind, which seem to argue in him inconstancy, and change of mind :

IV. Lastly, I shall take notice of the practical uses which ought to be made of the doctrine that God is for ever the same, and subject to no alteration.

I. I shall consider God, as he is unchangeable in his own nature and perfections.

From these plain and undeniable truths, that we are, and that we had a beginning, and that we made not ourselves, it follows that there is One above all, One who always was, who is independent and without a cause, who is the author of every thing else, who possesseth in a supreme degree all the perfections of which we find small portions and faint resemblances in ourselves.

This author of all must be unchangeable. He cannot change for the better, because he hath in himself all excellencies : he cannot change for the worse, because neither can he have a will or a power to hurt himself, nor can other beings be able to diminish his perfections,
since

since they have no other strength than he gave them, and receive their nature and their qualities from him. Thus reason teacheth us to conclude that God is unchangeable.

The holy Scriptures also teach us the same. They do not endeavour by strict and methodical reasonings to prove that it must be so; but they affirm that it is so, in very strong expressions.

In Exodus, God speaking to Moses, gives himself a new name, the name *Jehovah*; concerning the meaning of which there are * three opinions.

First, that it signifies, He who is of himself, supreme and independent.

Secondly, He who is without beginning and without end.

Thirdly, He who causeth things to be, or to come to pass, according to his will and pleasure, and who fulfils and performs whatsoever he declares and promises.

Whichsoever of these senses we follow, the name *Jehovah* implies, amongst other things, the unchangeable nature of God.

In the same book, God says to Moses, who asked him his name, I am that I am. Thus shalt thou say, I am hath sent me unto you.

* Vide Clericum ad Exod. iii. 14. vi. 3.

The expression of St. John in the beginning of the Revelation is of the same * extraordinary kind: Grace be unto you and peace from the Who is, and who was, and who shall be; that is, from him whose name is, Who is, and who was, and who shall be.

When God ascribes to himself the name, *I am*, it denotes that he is in a manner peculiar to himself. Other things are, but they are in a way altogether different. Material beings are, but as they are void of sense, and know not that they have a being, they are only a small remove above nothing. Our souls are in a manner far more excellent, for they feel and know themselves to be; but we are so changeable in our nature, so absolutely dependent for the beginning and continuance and circumstances of our being, that compared to God, we can scarcely be said to be. To him only it belongs to affirm of himself, in the strict and the true sense, *I am*.

The same perfection is ascribed to God in other places of Scripture, and in other expressions. He is called, the King immortal, who alone hath immortality, the incorruptible God, the living God, the Lord who changeth not, who

* Rev. i. 4.

is from everlasting to everlasting, who is the same, whose years fail not, the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Most of these things may be said of Angels and of human souls: We are living, immortal, incorruptible; our years fail not, and we shall be the same, that is thinking and rational beings, through all ages. Yet God alone is living, and immortal, and incorruptible, because he alone is so of himself, necessarily, independently, and in the most exalted and excellent sense.

As to his perfections likewise, God is unchangeable, for his perfections are himself, they are closely united to his being, they cannot be separated from it, and they are all connected with each other. As God is unchangeable, so he is unchangeably what he is, most powerful, wise, good, just, true, merciful, pure, and holy. This also is abundantly confirmed in the Scriptures, in which it is so often said that his truth and faithfulness, his mercy and righteousness endure and stand fast for ever and ever.

II. I shall consider God in his dealings with us, as he is our ruler, and shew that he is unchangeable in his will, his purposes, and decrees.

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This is a manifest consequence of the things which have been said ; for if God is unchangeable in his nature and perfections, whatsoever he decrees and resolves concerning mankind in general, or any of us in particular, he must and infallibly will accomplish. To resolve and not to perform is a certain mark of imperfection. He who resolves and performs not, either hath not the means to execute his purpose, and that is weakness and want of power ; or he alters his mind without a sufficient cause, and then he is fickle and inconstant ; or he is convinced that he ought not to do what he intended, and then it is plain that he was ignorant, mistaken, or blameable when he made his resolution. Now none of these things can have any place in God. As he is perfectly wise, just, and good, he can decree nothing which is not right and reasonable ; and as he is almighty, nothing can interpose to prevent the execution of it. It would be needless and endless to cite the passages of Scripture which establish this truth ; for the history of the Old Testament and the writings of the Prophets abound with proofs and with declarations that the counsels and the purposes of the Almighty stand fast for ever and ever, that the rise and fall of empires, and the prosperity and
adversity

adversity of his chosen people were appointed by his decrees, which were to be exactly and inevitably fulfilled.

III. I shall consider those actions and that part of God's conduct towards mankind, which seem to argue in him inconstancy and change of mind.

First; It is often said of God in the Scriptures, that he repents. It repented him that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at the heart. He repented that he had made Saul king. And in many places he is said to repent him of the evil that he had denounced.

When God is said to repent and to be grieved, it is manifest that such popular expressions are to be understood as spoken in condescension to the weakness of our apprehensions. All that is meant by them is, that as men repent and are grieved when things fall short of their expectations, and withdraw their favour from those who make an ill use of it; so God deals with sinners, though without any perturbation, without any change in himself: and as men again, upon the amendment and good behaviour of such persons, will sometimes alter their resolutions to punish them, will be appeased,

peased, and will treat them kindly; so God, who is uniform and unchangeable, is always ready to pardon those, who by a change in themselves from sin to righteousness become proper objects of his mercy.

Secondly, We learn from the Scriptures that God gave the Jews ritual laws, which in themselves and of their own nature were not good, and which he afterwards repealed by his Son. Human wisdom indeed, which is very limited, imperfect, and short-sighted, contrives laws as judiciously as it can, and afterwards discovers defects and errors in them, and then alters or repeals them: but surely it might be expected that from God, who is unchangeably and perfectly wise and good, should proceed laws like himself, laws perfectly wise and good, unchangeable and everlasting.

And such a Law hath indeed proceeded from God, namely the Law of nature and of reason, a Law which some injudicious persons take much pains and delight in vilifying and undervaluing, not understanding what they say, nor considering that, such as it is, it hath been the only Rule which God's Providence hath afforded to a great part of the inhabitants of this world, except some ancient traditions concern-

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ing the creation of the world, and the soul's immortality. This Law of nature is a law, which the human understanding, duly cultivated and improved, and divested of prejudice, is capable of discovering, a law which teacheth us to love and honour God, to be kind and merciful to all creatures, to keep our minds employed in acquiring knowledge and virtue, and our body in subjection to our mind, and our passions and inclinations in obedience to our reason.

This is the end and intent of the moral law which God gave to the Jews; this is the sum and substance of the Gospel of Christ; this would perhaps suffice for all religious purposes, if man were a reasonable and an innocent person.

But it is to be considered that man, though he be a rational, yet is also a weak, imperfect, ignorant and sinful creature, more or less; and therefore if God reveals himself to men, and gives them laws, there is a necessity that he should stoop in some measure to their defects, and give them not only those laws which in themselves are most excellent, but such laws as they can practise; laws which their situation and circumstances, their follies and iniquities render

render expedient; and this is the reason of the Ceremonial Law. Hence it comes to pass that in the whole conduct of God towards men, contained in the Old Testament, and in the representations which he there makes of himself, and in the style of the Scriptures, there are continual examples of great condescension and accommodation to the weakness and to the ignorance of men.

The Gospel is the natural and the moral law in full perfection; but as we are imperfect and cannot live up to it, it was necessary, that is, it was suitable to perfect goodness and mercy, to use some abatement and condescension. Therefore God, in compassion to our infirmity, for exact unfinning obedience substitutes repentance, which is accepted through the propitiation and mediation of Christ.

Thirdly; We find in the Scriptures some promises and threatenings, which are so expressed that they seem to be absolute and irreversibile; which yet, as the event shewed, were not accomplished; and this seems not to agree with the unchangeable nature of God.

The following observations may serve to explain this matter, and to set it in a true light.

First;

First; All the promises and threatenings contained in the New Testament are conditional, and the condition is plainly expressed. We are taught there that goodness shall be rewarded, probably in this world, certainly in the world to come; that obstinate disobedience shall infallibly be punished, and that repentance shall restore us to the favour of God. Thus our happiness or misery is made to depend upon our own choice and behaviour.

In the Old Testament likewise the far greater part of God's promises and threatenings are of the same kind: they are conditional, and the condition is named expressly. Of many places that might be produced, I shall mention only two: one from Jeremiah; At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation—to pull down and to destroy it; if that nation—turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought I would do unto them: And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation—to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight—then will I repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them: another from Ezechiel; When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity—for his iniquity that he hath done, shall he

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die,

die. Again, When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness—and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.

Secondly ; Some of God's decrees concerning societies or particular persons have no dependence upon the moral behaviour of men ; and these consequently are absolute and irreversible. Such were these, for example, that Abraham and Sarah should have a son in their old age, that the posterity of Abraham should inherit the land of Canaan, that from Abraham and from David should arise the Messias, that the posterity of Esau should serve the posterity of Jacob ; and many such like.

But thirdly, these decrees excepted which are prophetic and providential, all other declarations, though they may seem absolute and unchangeable, yet are not so ; for God reserves to himself a power of altering them, or suspending the execution of them.

Thus ; When God promiseth favour or temporal advantages to one or to more persons, this condition is supposed, though it be not named, That they behave themselves in a proper manner. If they be guilty of some heinous iniquity, God is at liberty, if we may use
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the expreffion, to recal the favour, or to continue it, as he judgeth expedient.

When God threatens temporal evil to one or to more perfons, though the threatening be denounced without any exception, yet if they repent, God may inflict or not inflict it, as he fees proper.

I fhall give examples of this; fome of which will fhew, at the fame time, that wife and good men underftood that the declarations of God, though made in an abfolute manner, might be altered by him.

When David had grievoufly offended God in the matter of Uriah, the prophet Nathan was fent from God, and part of his commiffion was to declare this to the King, The child that is born unto thee fhall furely die. The declaration was plain and peremptory; yet David, who was well skilled in things relating to divine revelation, never ceafed to pray for the life of the child, till he died.

Again; the prophet Ifaiah was fent to Hezekiah, to denounce this fentence of death: Thus faith the Lord, Set thy houfe in order, for thou fhalt die, and not live. But Hezekiah prayed and wept, and God heard him, and reverfed the fentence.

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Again;

Again; When the sons of Eli, the high-priest, had been guilty of most heinous offences, and their father had taken no care to restrain and correct them, severe judgments were denounced against the family, in the following words: The Lord God of Israel saith; I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me.

These are proofs that God's declarations, though made unconditionally, yet often depend upon the conduct of men, and that God reserveth to himself a right of fulfilling or revoking his promises or threats, according to their behaviour.

And that this is no sign of inconstancy in God, appears from these considerations:

First, God hath declared, as we shewed before, by Jeremiah and Ezechiel, that his promises and threatenings are to be commonly understood to admit such exceptions and limitations.

Secondly, Wise and good men in all times understood it to be so.

Thirdly, Human governors make laws in which they positively declare that they will punish such and such transgressions; yet they reserve

reserve to themselves a power of mitigating or not inflicting the punishment. They grant favours and privileges unconditional to some of their subjects, and to their heirs after them for ever; but in case of great crimes against the state, they are at liberty to take away the favour; and no one can justly account this a breach of promise. In like manner, God revealing himself to the Jews as a legislator and governor, condescended to the customs of men, promising and threatening absolutely, and yet reserving to himself the liberty of acting as the circumstances of things should require.

This is one reason for which God in the Scriptures often confirmed his promises and threats by an oath; to shew that the decree was fixed and unalterable, and depended not on the future behaviour of men. And in the Sacred Books it appears that whatsoever was thus once confirmed, was always punctually accomplished. Therefore Eli, when he heard that God had resolved the destruction of his family, and had sworn to it, did not attempt to pray that the sentence might be reversed, knowing that prayers would be ineffectual*; but, which was

* *Define fata Deum flecti sperare precando.*

the only thing left for him to do, submitted with humble resignation. It is the Lord, said he; let him do what seemeth him good.

It may be objected that God speaks thus to the rebellious Israelites, in the Book of Numbers: As I live——your carcases shall fall in the wilderness——ye shall not come into the land concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein. Here seems to be a breach, not only of a promise, but of an oath. But this difficulty is removed by observing, that the promise and the oath to bring them into the land of Canaan was not made to them personally, but to them as they were a nation; and to the nation it was fulfilled, though that generation died in the wilderness.

IV. It remains, in the fourth and last place, that we take notice of the practical uses which may be made of the doctrine, That God is for ever the same, and subject to no alteration.

1. The consideration of God's unchangeable nature, compared with our changeable condition, may teach us to entertain modest and humble thoughts, and to know ourselves to be, what we are, most imperfect creatures in all respects; in our bodies, which lie exposed to a thousand dangerous impressions and accidents

from the things about us, and of themselves tend to decay and dissolution; in our understanding, which is liable to error; in our memory, which often fails and forsakes us; in our friends and fortunes, which are a most uncertain possession; in our good dispositions, which at the best are not steady and uniform, but mixed and sullied with many faults and defects.

2. Since God is set forth in the Scriptures as the bright and perfect original which in all things we should resemble as nearly as we can, his unchangeable nature reminds us that we must endeavour, like him, to be fixed and constant in all that is good, in our love of virtue, and in our lawful promises to one another. It was said of a great man, that he was good, because he could not be otherwise*. The meaning is, that he was unalterably good, both by temper and by habit: a character which belonged not to him, nor to human nature. But it is a perfection towards which nearer and nearer advances may be made by a pious mind, which hath the Gospel for its guide, and the Holy Spirit of God for its assister.

* Cato, vir bonus; quia aliter esse non potuit.

3. The unchangeable nature of God suggests very powerful dissuasions from vice. The Scripture knows no decrees concerning the reprobation and salvation of particular persons, without regard to their moral qualifications. But there is a law which declares that obstinate and impenitent vice shall end in destruction. This law is as eternal and unchangeable as the nature of good and evil, as the nature and perfections of God. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but this decree shall not pass away: and therefore a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the everliving and immutable God.

4. Yet this unchangeable nature of our Creator, considered in another view, affords no less comfort and peace to the greatest offenders, if they will repent and turn to him. Their offences cannot be greater than his mercy and goodness, which endure to all eternity, ready to receive those who make themselves proper objects of his mercy.

5. If the consideration of God's immutability produce in us the profitable effects before mentioned, repentance, humility, a desire of improvement, and a resolution to persevere in our duty, it will also strengthen our faith, and enliven

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liven our hope, and enable us firmly to rely on his promises of providing for us and protecting us at all times ; and then, though we be weak, and all external things frail, and transitory, and deceitful, by depending upon the Almighty we secure to ourselves blessings and privileges of which no creature can deprive us ; we rise, as it were, above ourselves, above time and the world, and partake in some sort of the unchangeable and all-sufficient nature of our great Creator.

SERMON

...and cannot as firmly rely on
the promises of prospering for me and my people,
at all times; and that, though we be weak,
and all natural things weak and transitory, and
liable to depending upon the Almighty, we
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S E R M O N XII.

JOHN iv. 24.

*God is a spirit, and they that worship him must
worship him in spirit and in truth.*

THESE words are part of a discourse which our Saviour had with a woman of Samaria, to whom he discovered himself to be a prophet, and by whom he was consulted about an important question on which the Jews and Samaritans were at variance, namely, Whether the worship appointed by the Law of Moses were to be paid to God at the temple of Jerusalem, or at a mountain in Samaria? to which question Christ gives two answers.

First, he informs her that the debate would be decided in a short time, and in an unexpected manner. The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship

worship the Father. That is, The worship of God, according to the ceremonial law, shall soon cease, and in its room shall be established a more perfect service, not confined to any place.

Secondly, he tells her, concerning the controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans, that the Jews were in the right. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. The meaning seems to be this:

You * Samaritans do not serve God in a proper manner; you ought to worship him at Jerusalem, where God himself appointed the temple to be built, and the service of the temple to be performed. We Jews know the will of God concerning these things, and that in Jerusalem he hath chosen to place his name. You know nothing, except what you have received from us. We have not only the Law to guide us, but the Prophets also: our nation hath

* The Samaritans, in the days of Herod, having a mixture of strangers dwelling with them, and more intercourse with the Romans than the Jews had, were the more easily induced to pay religious honours to the Emperors and to their Statues. To which Christ alluded, when he said that they worshipped they knew not what. *Basnage*, Hist. des Juifs, vol. I. 374.

The interpretation which I have followed is more probable.

been honoured with a succession of persons sent from God to instruct us in divine things; and from Judæa, not from you, must the great Prophet arise, who shall be the Saviour of the world.

To this our Lord adds; But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That is, The worship of God which consists in sacrifices and other carnal ordinances, draws now to an end; and a new revelation will be made, directing men to honour God in a more spiritual and rational manner, in piety and in purity, in heart and soul, in a way more acceptable to him; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. He is a spirit, and therefore he is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

I. God is a spirit.

The holy Scriptures, in compliance with our capacities, and with the imperfections of human creatures and human language, represent God as having the body, the passions, and the infirmities of a man. They make mention of his eyes and ears, his hands and feet, his sleeping and waking; they ascribe to him fierce anger, and jealousy, and grief, and repentance, and joy, and desire. The unpolished language
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of the Hebrews, which also at the first was probably the language of Idolaters, might be another reason for its abounding with such expressions. But that no man might be so weak or so perverse as to take those expressions according to the letter, and entertain mean and unworthy thoughts of his Maker, the same Scriptures often add to those very descriptions something which manifestly shews how they are to be understood; and remind us that if God hath a body, the heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool; if he hath hands, they are hands which reach to the ends of the creation; if he hath eyes, the darkness to them is no darkness, and from them nothing is hidden; and in other places tell us that he is perfect, that he is blessed or happy, that he is unchangeable, that he is every where present, that he is a spirit, that no man hath seen him or can see him, that he is incomprehensible, and that the most exalted notion which we can possibly frame of him falls infinitely short of the truth.

God is a spirit. Consequently he is not a corporeal being, nor can he be the object of the human senses; he hath no body or form,
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he is the invisible God, whom no man hath seen or can see.

He is a spirit not united to matter, as the soul of man is to the body. The material world is not his body, but his creature and his servant. He acts upon it according to his will and pleasure, but it acts not upon him, or produces in him any alteration.

He is a spirit, who like us hath knowledge and power, but hath them without suspension or intermission, and in the highest perfection.

He is a spirit differing from all other spirits by many ways which we cannot possibly conceive, and excelling every other spirit beyond all imagination; because he is the Creator, and they the creatures; he independent, and they subsisting only by his power and permission.

This is the meaning of the words, God is a spirit.

II. Let us now, secondly, consider the duty arising thence. Since he is a spirit, he must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

To worship God in spirit and in truth, is in general to pay him a rational service, a service suitable both to his nature and to our own; which if we would perform, we must observe the following directions:

First,

First, we must ascribe to him all perfections; and this we may be enabled to do by considering our powers and our weaknesses, our good qualities and our defects, and by ascribing to God in the most eminent degree what is excellent in our nature, and also the perfections which are opposite and contrary to our defects.

Thus, we find in ourselves a certain degree of understanding, liberty, power, and goodness. If then we ascribe these in a supreme degree to God, we shall consider him as perfectly wise, knowing all things, incapable of being deceived, almighty, and able to perform whatsoever he pleaseth; ruling over the world, and governing all things with justice and equity, with clemency and mercy.

Again; when we survey our own imperfections, we find besides mortality, and a life of a short continuance, besides sin and misery, and error and ignorance, we find that we began to be at a certain time, that we received our being from God, that we depend upon him for its continuance; and that though our souls are immortal, yet it is by his gift who made them of such a nature, and they could not continue a moment without his permission and against his

his will. There are perfections contrary to these imperfections, and therefore we conclude that God is without beginning and without end, receiving nothing from any other being, independent, sufficient to his own happiness, the first cause of all things, and the author of every good gift.

To ascribe to God these perfections is one part of the worship due to him. We are sufficiently instructed in these things, sufficiently for the purposes of religion, by the Gospel which is received and preached amongst us, and by the many excellent treatises which we have upon these subjects; and there is no great danger that we should err in this part of our duty. But a bare acknowledgment that God is a perfect being is not enough. We should frequently call it to mind, and dwell upon it with pleasure, and entertain an habitual and practical knowledge of it, and so remember it as to be the better and the wiser for it, and consider what effects it should produce in us, and what behaviour and temper, what love and reverence, what faith and reliance, what resignation and humility, what pious sorrow, what hope, what diligence and improvement the perfections of God are adapted to excite in us.

2. If we would serve God in a rational manner, we must be careful to ascribe to him no imperfections. In this point men of all ages, and of all religions have been remarkably disposed to fall into error, to acknowledge in general that God is perfect, and at the same time to entertain notions of him which are by no means consistent with perfection.

Thus, the Gentiles used to call the Supreme Being, *Best*, and *Greatest*. The expression was just, and conveyed noble and honourable sentiments of God. But these same Gentiles, forgetting or overlooking all that was implied in this expression, worshipped God in the sun, moon, and stars, worshipped him under images of men, of beasts, and of monsters, added to the supreme God inferior deities, and paid them equal reverence with him, ascribed to them all human weaknesses and vices, gave divine honours to dead men, and worshipped their deities with childish and absurd, sometimes with impure, impious, and cruel rites and ceremonies.

The Jews, though they had a divine revelation to guide them, and in it many excellent rules of morality, and noble descriptions of all the divine perfections, yet often, from the time of Moses to the time of the Babylonian captivity,

vity, fell into image-worship of God, and which was far worse, into the worship of the Gentile deities; and afterwards, though they kept themselves free from idolatry, yet they entertained many mean and unworthy notions of God, and ascribed to him such a government of the world, and such a judgment concerning human actions, as is contrary to all notions of right reason, supposing that ceremonial observations were as valuable in his sight as virtue, and would supply defects in morality, and that God cast off all regard to mankind, and cared for none except themselves and their proselytes.

When the Gospel began to be preached, not only the Jews in general, but even the Apostles could scarcely believe at first that the Gentiles should be admitted into this new covenant; they thought it a strange, an amazing thing, that God should shew as much favour to a Greek or to a Roman as to a child of Abraham; yet was this so far from contradicting the law of nature and reason, or the divine perfections, that it must seem to us at present no less amazing how they could adopt and entertain such narrow sentiments.

Much of this wrong way of thinking, many of those Jews who first embraced Christianity

brought along with them, and could not shake off, contending that it was necessary for Christians to embrace the whole Law no less than the Gospel. St. Paul hath largely discussed this controversy in his Epistles, asserting in opposition to these false teachers, the doctrine of Christian liberty, and shewing that men are justified by faith, or obedience to the Gospel, and not by an observance of the ceremonial law.

One plain design of Christianity, was to teach men to entertain worthy thoughts of God and of the duty due to him, and to avoid the above-mentioned errors of the Gentiles and of the Jews; and yet Christians, as if they had never been told that God was a spirit, and was to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and as if they had thought it unlawful to surpass either Jews or Gentiles, corrupted in all imaginable ways the purity and simplicity of the Gospel; introduced images of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, and of God the Father; fell down before them, and paid them honour and reverence; made themselves new mediators, and prayed to Saints and Angels; ascribed a divine nature to consecrated bread and wine, which the Lord had commanded to be eaten, not to be adored;
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taught that faith and reason were opposite to each other, and that it was necessary to believe contradictions; established a spiritual tyranny over the conscience, and, as much as in them lay, permitted men to be neither free nor rational creatures; made a great part of religion to consist in absurd and uncommanded austerities, in a reliance upon the virtues and merits of other men, in pomp and shew, in hatred and cruelty towards all who differed from them in opinion.

And amongst many who are free from these errors, there are notions to be found which detract from the perfections of God. Some magnify his absolute and uncontrollable power at the expence of his goodness; others hope that he may be appeased by a few acts of devotion and outward reverence, without amendment of life, which opinion can never be reconciled with his wisdom, justice, and holiness,

3. If we would form to ourselves just notions of God, we must not only ascribe to him all perfections, and remove from him all imperfections, but we must account him incomprehensible, and be sensible that his nature surpasseth our conceptions, and that it is not given to us to know him as he is. If we think that we

can fully and clearly apprehend him, or any his perfections, we must at the same time lessen them, and make them finite and defective, by bringing them down to our finite and deficient understanding. Hence have arisen the errors of those who have fancied God to be like themselves, and clothed with an human body, because they could not imagine what a pure spirit was, and how it could subsist and act.

But here the opposite extreme is to be shunned. We ought to be sensible, and to acknowledge that God is an incomprehensible object; yet we ought not to suppose that we can have no true and just conceptions at all about him and his perfections. The experience which we have of ourselves, and of the operations and actions of our own mind, will give us a representation of God, not adequate indeed to his nature, and yet true and just as far as it reacheth. We are made in his image, and we partake of his perfections, and whatever is excellent in the effect, must be originally in the first cause. Life, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, activity, and power, are the same in kind in all rational beings, and differ only in degree; or else they are words without a meaning, and there is no such thing as
sense

sense and truth. We may then affirm of our Creator, without any danger of error and delusion, that he is very wise, very good, and very powerful, that he ever was so, and ever will be so, that he is the sole Author of all, upon whom all depend, and from whom all receive every thing that they possess; and thus far our knowledge of him is clear enough, and sufficient for all the purposes of morality and religious duty.

4. If we would worship God in a spiritual manner, we must take care to entertain just notions of religion.

The principal parts of religion, and the ends for which we are made and designed were these:

First, to love and reverence God above all things, and to shew it by those actions and that behaviour which gratitude, and veneration, and reliance naturally suggest.

Secondly, to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to do to others as we would they should do to us.

Thirdly, to amend what we can discover to be faulty and deficient in ourselves, and to cultivate and improve our understanding.

All other parts of religion are inferior to these; they are means and helps to the obtaining of these ends; and as they conduce more or less to this purpose, they are more or less important.

By considering our duty in this light, we shall be better able to perceive the meaning of our Saviour's precept, to serve God in spirit and in truth, and we may preserve ourselves from that blind superstition, and that intemperate zeal for smaller matters, to which the bulk of mankind hath ever betrayed a strong propensity.

But here, likewise, a contrary extreme is to be avoided. We must remember that morality, though it be the principal part, is not the whole of religion. Our Lord came to be our instructor, our redeemer, and mediator. A diligent endeavour therefore to learn what he requires us to believe and to do, and a reliance upon him as upon a guide, and a Saviour, and an intercessor, and an observance of his ordinances, is as much our duty as sobriety, or charity, or any other moral virtue.

5. Thus far we have considered the spiritual and true worship of God, principally as it relates to the notions which we entertain, and to the

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the judgments which we form concerning his perfections and our religion. I shall now consider it with a more particular regard to the effects, and to the behaviour which it requires. Therefore, fifthly, to worship God in spirit and in truth, is to endeavour to imitate and resemble him.

A speculative knowledge of God's perfections will be of small service to us, unless we be deeply and suitably affected by them, and excited to a desire of resembling our heavenly Father in all things, as far as our weakness will permit. His goodness, his long-suffering and mercy in particular, require our imitation. These we should consider as they are in the divine nature, or as they appeared in the Son of God, who took upon him our nature, and became an example more obvious and familiar to our apprehension, and upon which we may more easily form ourselves and our behaviour. From his doctrine and practice we may learn that to do good should be our chief care and occupation, and is our greatest glory and honour. To do good to others, when it is advantageous at the same time to ourselves, exposes us to no inconvenience, and is attended with a present reward, even this is right, and in some degree commendable;

mendable; to do good to those who are poor and unable to return it, or unthankful and unwilling to acknowledge it, this is far more excellent; but to do good, and to suffer evil for it, this is the highest pitch to which human virtue can arise.

6. If we would worship God in spirit and in truth, we must be attentive when we address ourselves to him, and appear in his presence.

This is a duty in which we are often deficient; and our defects of this kind proceed from coldness and indifference to things sacred and serious, and from too great a fondness for the world, and for sensible objects. Hence it comes to pass, that though we know that we ought at certain times to worship God, and though we observe those times, and meet together for that purpose, we suffer our thoughts to stray, and our imagination to wander through the amusements and the diversions and the affairs of this life. Thus we change the spiritual worship of God into a ceremonial worship, or into something that deserveth not even that name, into something lower and meaner than any part of that ceremonial worship which the Gospel hath abolished as useless and imperfect. We almost act like those profane Jews, who
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having vowed a sacrifice, chose for that purpose the blind and the lame, and the sick, and the torn, and the corrupt, the refuse of the flock. Offer it now unto thy Governor, says God in the Prophet; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? Not much unlike to this is the behaviour of those who present to God the sacrifice of fools, sounds without sense, words without meaning, and a body without a mind; whose very devotion is blameable, and ought to be concluded at least with acknowledgments of the fault which they have committed in it, and with a prayer to God to forgive those prayers which they have been uttering with heedlessness and irreverence.

This is not to worship God in spirit and in truth; it is rather not to worship him at all in any sense; it is to have no notion of his supreme majesty and authority, and of our own wants, weakness, and dependence, one serious thought of which might be sufficient to dispel all other thoughts, and to make us as attentive and as much in earnest as when we endeavour to make ourselves acceptable to men, and to acquire some little advantage in our temporal affairs.

7. Part of that true and spiritual worship which is due to God is thus described by our Saviour: Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, who pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret. And when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the Heathen, who think that they shall be heard for their much speaking; for your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him.

The public worship of God is, without question, a necessary and important duty; but forasmuch as we are often led to it by motives not the most commendable, by compliance with custom, by respect for our superiors, by love of reputation, by interest, private worship hath in some respects the advantage over it, and that intercourse between God and the soul which is quite concealed from the sight and knowledge of others, is often the sincerest and the truest act of reverence and faith which we pay to him.

If we accustom ourselves to this secret conversation with God, and preserve that habitual reverence

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verence towards him, and that opinion of his perfections and of our own defects which the Gospel teacheth us to entertain, we shall never fall into that vain and senseless babbling which our Lord ascribes to the Gentiles. If the heart be duly disposed, words will be ready to express our sentiments. Eloquence is not required of us as necessary to recommend our prayers to our heavenly Father; and yet, if it were required, even in this we need not be deficient; for the *affections are always eloquent. If we feel our wants, our wants will teach us to pray; and if we are sensible of benefits received, gratitude will teach us to return thanks.

8. Lastly: The true and spiritual worship of God consists in nothing more eminently than in submitting ourselves entirely to his good providence with patience and contentment in our station, and acquiescence under it, and an expectation of receiving good things from the hand of God in that manner, and in that degree, and at that time, whether here or hereafter, which shall seem best to him.

* Imperitis quoque, si modo sunt aliquo affectu concitati, verba non desunt. Quinctilian, x. 7. p. 953.

Indeed

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Indeed if we are in a state of prosperity, in a full possession of all temporal blessings, there seems to be little opportunity for the exercise of this duty. Our principal duty then is to receive the good things of this life with gratitude and thankful acknowledgment, to consider them as uncertain and transitory, to use them with moderation and discretion, and to employ them to the honour of God, and to the service of mankind. But since God hath so ordered the course of human things, that there is no perfect happiness, no uninterrupted ease, no sincere pleasure in this life; but troubles and sickness, and pain, and disappointments, and losses and sorrows are scattered up and down here below, and wait for us and overtake us in some part or other of our progress through mortality, we shall scarcely ever want opportunities of exercising the patient and submissive virtues of resignation to the will of the Almighty. In all times and in all circumstances to rely upon him as upon our great friend and benefactor, and firmly to believe that he orders all with perfect wisdom and goodness, and that they who love him shall receive from him whatsoever is expedient for them; this is to honour and worship him,

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and all the powers of the soul, and to pay him
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S E R M O N XIII.

ROM. ii. 11.

There is no respect of persons with God.

HOW is this possible, since all men are what God hath made them, and since no one thing can more differ from another, than one person seems to differ from another? Consider man in his body, his fortunes, his situation, his temper, his understanding, and his heart, and compare him with his fellow-creatures, and you will find that more variety can hardly be conceived than is to be observed in the human race.

As to the body, one is defective, and another is well-formed; one is deprived of some of the senses, or hath them in a low degree, another enjoys them all in their full vigour; one languishes under a weak and a sickly constitution, another is blessed with health and strength; one lives, if he can be said to live, in continual bodily pain, another is quite free from such dis-

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orders ; one hath length of days, another is cut off in the flower of youth.

As to circumstances ; one is poor, and another is rich, one meets with a series of disasters and disappointments, with few friends and with many adversaries, and his assiduous labours obtain no reward ; another is successful and favoured by the world, every one is ready to serve and assist him, and things take a surprising turn in his behalf ; one is doomed to obscurity, and is exposed to insults, is a servant, a drudge, a captive, and a slave ; another is powerful, and in high stations, and honour and respect wait upon him.

As to temper ; one is easily satisfied, and not soon discomposed, and possesses serenity, and peace of mind ; another is by constitution timorous, or fretful, or anxious, or desponding, or melancholy, and is plagued with forebodings, with fears and gloomy horrors.

As to the passions ; they seem to be more impetuous in some, and therefore to require more skill and pains, to keep them in due order ; whilst others experience less difficulty in governing them, and find them more compliant to rule and reason.

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As to natural abilities; one hath a strong memory, a lively fancy, a good judgment, a fine taste, and a large capacity; another is so deficient in all these respects, that small improvements are to be expected or produced in him.

As to external advantages, of country, situation, and education, upon which so much depends, one is placed in a land of liberty, learning, religion, and good manners, and wants no means and helps of enlarging the mind and improving the heart; another hath his hard lot in regions of darkness and tyranny, is thrown amongst savages, and barbarians, and dwells by the dens of uncivilized men, and of wild beasts little worse than they.

And yet these are all the offspring of one and the same God, who is said to be good to all, and to be no respecter of persons.

To clear up the divine impartiality from the objections arising out of this diversity of capacities and condition, we must in the first place form to ourselves a right notion of the fault which we call respecting of persons, and we must distinguish between matters of mere favour, and matters of justice. Now amongst men, and in their intercourse with each other,

favours and gifts, to which another person hath no claim, are free, and either lawfully bestowed or lawfully withheld, and none can be accused as a respecter of persons, who makes one rather than another the object of his kindness, if he is guided by prudence, or by innocent affection. Indeed it should never be forgotten that what we call matters of favour are oftener matters of right and justice than we commonly imagine, and that usually there are persons who have a fair claim to our good offices. But yet sometimes, as in the choice of friends and acquaintances, or of dependents and servants, or in the disposal of what we have to give, we cannot keep company with every one, or employ every one, or oblige and assist every one, and we may prefer one deserving person to another perhaps equally deserving, without being respecters of persons. But in points of justice and equity, in protecting or acquitting, in recompensing or correcting, in matters of trust, and when power and authority is committed to us by the Public, whosoever favours the guilty, or hurts the innocent, or gives or refuses without a sufficient reason, or contrary to the eternal rules of right, such an one is partial, or prejudiced, or a respecter of persons.

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The same distinction holds true in relation to God's dealings with his creatures. His giving them more or less, his placing them here or there when he calls them into being, is a matter of favour, and no account should be asked or expected, and what is called respect of persons hath nothing to do with it. But in his behaviour to his creatures, consequent to their behaviour towards him, in this he acts by the rules of justice and of equity, and in this his justice and his equity shall be so manifest, as to clear him from all imputations of partiality.

If you examine the passages of Scripture where God is said to be no respecter of persons, you will find that this perfection is ascribed to him, not directly as he is Creator, but rather as he is Ruler and Judge, and dispenser of rewards and punishments ; and so with relation to men, when they are commanded not to respect persons, they also are considered, not as doing favours, but as exercising acts of dominion, authority, judgment and justice, in a public or in a domestic and private character.

These considerations remove in a great measure the objections to God's providence, and shew that it cannot be charged with partiality.

But, secondly, the present diversity of condition amongst men is so uncertain and variable, and lasts for so very short a space, that it becomes in this view far more inconsiderable than is usually imagined.

Man is called into this world, to dwell here for a few days or years, and then to depart and launch out into eternity. This is his first stage of life, his entrance into being, and his course through this first period is presently ended. One is in a flourishing condition, and another struggles with adversity; and whilst we gaze with admiration or envy upon the one, and slight or pity the other, the scene closes, and the vision fades away. How trifling are these temporal and transient conveniences and inconveniences, compared with the endless duration that opens before us! It is our future lot and situation that alone can determine us happy or unhappy upon the whole.

But besides this, even the present, the temporal condition of men is perpetually varying, and nothing is permanent and durable, but all men, more or less, pass through the vicissitudes of what we call good and evil.

Nor is this all yet; for even temporal happiness depends not so much upon externals as

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we are apt to think. Many other circumstances are to be taken into the account; and of two persons, of whom the one passes for happy, and the other for unhappy in human estimation, perhaps the sum total of pleasure and pain which they experience is nearly equal.

We are also to take this into consideration, that natural evil, such as poverty and pain, flights and disappointments, is not always a real calamity, but rather discipline and correction, tending to make the sufferer better, to guard him from danger, to save him from ruin, to teach him wisdom, and to guide him to happiness; and in this respect it becomes desirable and beneficial.

Thirdly, The evils of which men complain, are often evils of their own procuring.

Virtue has a natural tendency to make men happy, and a natural connection with happiness. This connection is sometimes suspended and interrupted by accidental causes, and by the iniquity of others, in the present disorderly state of things; but usually and upon the whole, the effects of goodness are highly advantageous. Vice hath the same connection with misery, or rather is more intimately united with it: it hurts the body, the fortunes, the temper. the

understanding, and the reputation. Sometimes a good man is exposed to poverty and misery; but a wicked person is never truly happy, never so happy as he would have been, if he had adhered to the cause of Virtue. If the evils to which men are obnoxious were duly examined, and traced up to their causes, we should find that the greater part of them are the consequences either of thoughtless folly and indiscretion, or of deliberate wickedness. Therefore these sufferings are not to be charged to the divine administration, but entirely to those who bring them upon themselves.

Fourthly, The impartiality of Providence, whatsoever difficulties may attend it in the present state, will be fully cleared up in the next, and we must wait with patience to that time for the fuller solution of some of our doubts.

As to the temporal conveniences and inconveniences of life, we have shewed them to be no reasonable objection to the divine goodness and impartiality. It is indeed the moral and religious difference between men that embarrasses the question, and creates the main difficulty. One hath an opportunity of improving his heart and his understanding, and is a good man and a good Christian; another is deprived

of this knowledge and of these advantages, and hath nothing to guide him besides the dictates of natural conscience, and the faint glimmerings of unimproved and uncultivated reason; and this by no fault of his own, but by having his hard lot in the dark regions of rudeness and of ignorance. God is the Father of them both; but he makes a wide difference between them, and seems to treat the one as a son, and the other as a stranger: one is a favourite child of God, the other a forlorn child of Nature.

In answer to this, the Scripture saith that God will judge the world in righteousness, and deal with every one according to his talents, and to the use which he hath made of them. The following suppositions may therefore be admitted, as agreeing very well with Reason and with Scripture.

All men have it in their power to do all that God requires at their hands.

All those who upon the whole, and in the main, act suitably to their abilities and capacities, have a secret influence of God, to help them so far as is needful.

All such persons have Jesus Christ for their redeemer, though he never was revealed to them.

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All who have thus behaved themselves, shall enjoy the beneficial effects of it hereafter, and be removed to a better condition than this, in which they shall be happy in various degrees, but yet according to the extent of their desires and capacities, and shall have the means and opportunities of making a greater progress and improvement in goodness and happiness.

All they who by their own perverseness and wilful depravity have misemployed and abused the talents committed to them, shall suffer for it in such degree and manner as the supreme Wisdom shall judge expedient.

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and unto whomsoever little is given, of him little shall be required. This is the voice of Reason, this is the express declaration of our Saviour. This removes much of the disparity of conditions, and makes it an ambiguous point whether of these stations is the more eligible, a point which lies beyond all human skill to decide. Who knows whether the lot of the Savage be not better than that of the Philosopher, and the lot of the slave than that of the king? But thus much we know, that every one ought to be contented with that state in which his wise and good Creator hath

placed him, and to conclude that it will be the best for him, if he makes the best use of it. Upon these suppositions the divine impartiality stands fully justified.

We have thus far considered the inequality amongst men, and shewed that it is consistent with the divine equity. Let us now take another view of the question, and shew that men, in many respects, and with a few exceptions, are rather more upon the level, more like one another, than we usually imagine.

All men have a mortal body and an immortal soul, and are liable to the same agreeable or disagreeable impressions from external objects, have the same senses, and much the same powers and faculties.

All are inhabitants of the same place, have the same earth to feed them, the same sun and stars to shine upon them, the same air to breathe, and the same heavens to cover them.

All have the same ordinary means and methods to improve themselves, such as diligence, application, sobriety, civility; and all suffer by the contrary vices, by laziness, dissoluteness, carelessness and rudeness.

As they are reasonable creatures, they have the same great Law, the law of Reason,

son, or Natural Religion, to guide and instruct them.

As they stand equally in need of the divine assistance, they all have it, as far as it is necessary; or may secure it, if they behave themselves suitably to their situation and circumstances.

They are all subject to one supreme Governor, to whom they are answerable, and before whom they all must appear, and be accepted or rejected, not according to the rank which they held here below, or to the things which they possessed, but according to their conduct, and to their use or their abuse of the divine blessings.

Christianity indeed, or the knowledge of it, is rather matter of favour than of absolute necessity, and therefore hath not been revealed to all; but this arises from other causes, and not from any thing in the nature of Christianity, that might confine it to particular times and places. It is plainly intended for universal use, and adapted to mankind; and herein it differs from Judaism, which was partial and local, and calculated for one nation.

Where the Gospel is revealed, it is for us and for our children, for the rich and the poor, for the learned and for the ignorant; the same
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duties are propounded to us all, under the same rewards, and the same penalties.

These things being duly considered, it appears that men resemble each other in the most important things, are children of the same earthly ancestor, and of the same heavenly Father, and are brethren belonging to one and the same family.

Hitherto we have been removing objections against the divine impartiality, objections arising principally from the variety of conditions, and the disorderly appearance of things in this present state of trial and pilgrimage.

Now we will proceed to prove directly that God is and must needs be impartial, from his own nature and perfections; a point very easy to be proved, and therefore not requiring a long discussion.

All partiality manifestly arises either from vice, or from weakness and ignorance; consequently it can find no access to an all-perfect Being.

As God is almighty, self-existing, eternal and independent, all his creatures are at the same distance below him, that is, at an infinite distance. Compared with each other, they differ in a vast variety of degrees; but compared with

with him, they are what finite is to infinite, and bear no proportion at all. Therefore he must behold them all, as they are created beings, with the same indifference, and the same disposition. Before they existed, there was nothing that could recommend one more than another to his favour; and after they were called into being, nothing but their diversity of behaviour can produce in him any different regard for them.

As he is perfectly wise, he must treat them according to the laws of wisdom, equity, and justice, laws which are everlasting and inviolable; and not by the dictates of partiality, which is blind, fanciful, mutable, and unaccountable.

As he is perfectly good, he considers them all as his offspring, and his children. He designed them for happiness, he created them to do them good, and not to do them harm, and nothing can hinder him from exerting this beneficence, except their own fault, their undutiful behaviour.

Thus the impartiality of God appears from his own nature and perfections, and from the express testimony of Scripture; and the objections to it, and the difficulty of reconciling it with

with the course of nature and of providence, arise from our imperfect view of things, and our inability to comprehend the several parts of this vast system, and to look through infinity and eternity.

The practical use to be made of this doctrine is as follows: After adoring our great Author as the fountain of all good, and placing our whole confidence in him, that he will bless our endeavours to serve him, and lift up the light of his countenance upon us, we should try to imitate him in this perfection, and like him to be no respecters of persons. Be ye perfect, says our Lord, as your heavenly Father is perfect; and consequently, Be ye impartial, as he is impartial.

It is indeed extremely difficult for mortal man to be impartial. But we must endeavour to acquire this upright disposition, and to act suitably to it. This must be done by divesting ourselves of those bad qualities and inclinations which lead us to unfairness and partiality in our conduct; and they are in general our passions, when they are irregular, and exceed their bounds, and are turned into vices.

Thus; Pride and insolence always produce partiality. The love of power teaches us to oppress

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oppress others purely to shew our power, to favour those who submit to us in all things, and to be unkind and cruel to those who refuse to be our slaves.

Pride is usually accompanied with the love of praise, and then he who flatters most will be best rewarded, and he who cannot submit to such mean arts will be slighted and rejected; and so every favour will be disposed of to those who least deserve it, and the children's bread given to the dogs. It is a melancholy thing to observe that many persons, who have their good qualities, yet have this weakness, and cannot bear plain dealing, nor see through the artifices of parasites, nor distinguish between compliment and sincerity.

Covetousness and self-interest are unavoidably accompanied with partiality. Such persons usually sell their favours to the best bidder, without any regard to any other qualification, and have no consideration for those who can make no other return than thanks and gratitude. As an inordinate love of gain is the root of all evil, so is it particularly of partiality and prostitution, both in matters of courtesy and in matters of justice, and persons of this temper lie under strong temptations to violate the rules
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of honesty and equity, when it may be done with impunity, and with present profit.

Party zeal, either civil or religious, when indiscreet and intemperate, hath the same bad influence in biasing the judgment; and the foulest things are then said and done without remorse, to serve what is imagined to be a good cause.

Anger and envy also, when indulged, always lead men to carry their spleen and resentment beyond all reason and decency, to overlook the good qualities, to aggravate the defects, to misrepresent the innocent actions of those at whom they are offended, to listen to any calumnies raised against them, and to refuse them the offices even of justice and common humanity.

Credulity, and easiness, and indolence of temper, are also parents of partiality. Persons of this turn of mind are led by others, and depend upon their judgment of men, as well as of opinions, and will give themselves no trouble to look into things, and to get proper information, but will say and behave as they are directed; and thus it is often seen that even a good-natured person will do an ill-natured action.

Again, there is in some a fantastical and capricious temper, by which they adopt unac-

countable likings and dislikings, and are kind to one and cold to another for nothing, for no reason besides humour and prejudice. The evil effect of this folly is often found in families, where one child and one dependent shall be indulged and humoured, and another slighted and kept at a distance, for no imaginable cause; the usual consequence of which absurd conduct is, that the most favour is shewed to those who least deserve it, who make the worst returns for it, and who are the most spoiled by it.

Lastly, Love and friendship are too often accompanied with partiality. Pity it is that love and friendship, which are in themselves so good and amiable, should make us misbehave ourselves towards any of our fellow-creatures, and that these fair parents should produce so foul an offspring. But whenever our affection for any person is excessive, and not founded upon reason, it induces us to serve the beloved and idolized object at the expence of our duty to God, to mankind, and to ourselves, and by shewing too much kindness to some, to shew too little to others who have an equal right and claim to it.

From these disorderly passions we must endeavour to divest ourselves, and set our affections
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upon truth, justice, integrity, and equity, and remember our Saviour's rule as the best direction to do to others as we would that they should do to us. According as we observe or neglect this precept, God will deal with us when we shall appear before him to give an account of ourselves. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you, and as ye have judged others, so likewise shall ye be judged. A decree very comfortable, or very formidable, as our behaviour shall make it turn either to our future advantage or detriment.

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MARK xii. 30.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

I SHALL not omit any thing of practical use upon this subject, if I can shew you,

I. On what the love of God should be founded :

II. In what it consists, and what effects it produces :

III. By what means we may bring ourselves to perform this duty.

I. Let us consider on what the love of God should be founded.

Love, if it be a rational affection, and not a blind passion, is founded upon the beneficent nature of the person whom we love. Either he hath shewed kindness to us, and then our love ariseth from gratitude ; or we know that

he delights in goodness, and therefore, though we have no personal obligation to him, we conclude that he would serve us, if he were sensible that we deserved it, and if it were in his power, and therefore we love him. Thus we love persons with whom we are not acquainted, and whom we probably may never see, because we have heard of their good report. Thus we love persons long ago dead, whose virtues we have read in history with wonder and pleasure; we represent them in our thoughts as benefactors to mankind, to whose bright examples we are obliged, and who would have been our friends, if we had lived and conversed together.

There are many perfections besides goodness, to which we ought to pay a due regard, wherever we meet with them; but there is not one besides goodness, which hath any right to our love. True it is, that a good being, by possessing all other perfections, is able to exert his goodness upon all occasions, and therefore deserves a greater degree of our love, than one whose goodness is more confined, and less beneficial.

This is easily applied to God. By natural light and by revelation we find that he surpasses
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all in goodness, as much as in every other excellence; that he is the Best and the Greatest. As he is the Greatest, we ought to reverence him; as he is the Best, we ought to love him.

Some have weakly and injudiciously affirmed that the motives, inducing us to love God, ought not to be taken from the benefits which he confers upon us, but from the sole consideration of his infinite perfections, and that thus our love will be refined and disinterested. They bid us consider God in a manner in which it is impossible to consider him, as a Being from whom we receive nothing; they bid us love him, and they exclude the only just cause which we have of loving him. We cannot love God purely because he is infinite, independent, everlasting, all knowing, and almighty, most just and most wise, but we love him because he is our Father and our great Benefactor, whose power gave us being, whose Providence preserves us, whose goodness prevents us with blessings, whose long suffering bears with us, whose mercy forgives us; and this love is by no means faulty in its motives, since it is founded upon gratitude, and a due sense of the favours which we have received

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from the Author of all happiness, the first cause of every good gift. The Scriptures, which frequently call upon us to love God, do as frequently remind us of our obligations to him, to excite our love: and in this, as in other instances, we shall find it a never-failing truth, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, that the precepts relating to piety and morality, and the arguments used to enforce them, delivered with much plainness and simplicity in the holy Scriptures, are preferable to all the refinements which have been added to them; for indeed these refinements are usually fantastical, and the inventions of men who have more imagination than judgment.

II. Let us proceed to shew in what the love of God consists, and how it should exert itself. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

These expressions, with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, with all the strength, seem not to have each a distinct particular sense, though endeavours have been used to find and ascertain them. They seem rather to mean in general that our love for God must be sincere, active and constant; and they

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were intended, it may be, to intimate to the people of Israel that they must worship and love and honour God, and him alone, and not serve other Gods besides him, and divide their hearts and their reverence towards different objects of devotion: for thus is the precept introduced; Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God, &c.

The emphatical force of these words, with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and the perfect goodness of God, who is worthy of the highest degree of our affections, and whom it is impossible to love too much and to serve too well, might incline us to think, with some interpreters of Scripture, that a perfect love is here required in the most exalted sense that can be imagined, and that we ought to entertain no thought and design, and perform no action which relates not directly to God and to his service: But then if we consider that this is what mere human nature cannot in any manner accomplish, that it is what the best of men, even with the divine assistance, never performed; if we consider that this precept was given to the Jews under a dispensation not so spiritual and excellent as the Gospel, and that
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God absolutely required this proof of their obedience, and made it a necessary condition of obtaining his favour, and that some of them are said in Scripture to have fulfilled this condition, as David and others, who were righteous men indeed, but neither free from many failings, nor so good as many Christians have been; if we consider this, we may well descend to a more moderate interpretation, and say that the love of God is a grateful sense of his goodness, and sincere desire to please him.

As to particulars,

1. The love of God is a love by which we give him the preference. We must seek his favour more than any other objects of our desires, and be willing to part with them all, rather than to lose it. The love of God therefore subdues all affections contrary to itself, that is, all vicious habits, and disposes us to love those things which are innocent and lawful, with moderation, and so as to be ready to resign them if God should require it. This is what we are able to do, and what the children of this world constantly do, to gratify a favorite vice, to which they sacrifice all other inclinations and interests. They love health, and long life, and reputation, and relations, and friends,

friends, and honours, and power, and sensual pleasures, and riches. But if the love of riches, or of sensual pleasures, or pride, and vain-glory be the predominant passion, they will for the sake of it give up not only things for which they have a small value, but things which they really love and esteem in a considerable degree.

The person who loves God hath his trials and temptations: the three Idols of the world, Wealth, Power, and Pleasure, would seduce him from his obedience, and for the sake of them he sometimes experiences inclinations to evil; but his love to God prevails over these inferior desires, and by degrees subdues them.

He who loves God, loves also many other things; he loves life, and health, and reputation, and liberty, and innocent diversions, and useful employments, and his friends and family; but if at any time it becomes necessary for him to part with these, or with his virtue, he can quit them and embrace poverty, solitude, confinement, contempt, disgrace, and pain, and persecution, and death, rather than offend God, and cease to serve him.

2. A constant effect of the love of God is frequently to contemplate upon him; for whatsoever

soever hath a place in our heart, must have a place in our thoughts. We shall often reflect upon his perfections, particularly upon his goodness, with wonder and delight, with gratitude and thanksgiving, and at the same time upon ourselves as upon the objects of that goodness. They therefore who scarcely ever think of God in the days of health and prosperity, or ever seriously address themselves to him, except in danger and distress, may be certain that they have no love for him.

3. Another effect of love towards God, is to entertain just and honourable notions of him. Love is ever attended with esteem; and when it is misplaced, or greater than it ought to be, it fancies the object of its liking to be much more excellent than it really is. Hence it is, that we often cannot discover the failings of our friends and favourites, which to every other eye are visible enough. If therefore love to our fellow-creatures can make us overlook defects where there are so many, certainly love towards God ought at least to preserve us from fancying defects in him in whom there are none. God is all perfect, but in his government of the world, in the present state of irregularity, of wickedness, and of misery which he permits,

permits, there are some difficulties. He who loves God is persuaded that these discords destroy not the harmony of the divine administration, that all is ordered for the best, and that the ways of Providence shall in due time be cleared and justified; and by this persuasion he preserves his mind free from repining discontent under his present circumstances, and from injurious thoughts of his maker and governor.

4. Another constant effect which the love of God produceth in us, is an endeavour to promote his honour and his interests; for we would willingly add to the happiness of those whom we love and esteem, and we ever have their welfare at heart. We know that the happiness of God is perfect, and incapable of receiving increase or suffering diminution from any thing, that his creatures can do. Yet he hath put it in our power, in some sort, to exert this act of love even towards him. In condescension to our capacities and affections, he represents himself as wanting something which we are able to do for him, as desiring that goodness and happiness may abound here below, and that vice, with all the evils attending and following it, may be restrained; he represents him-

himself as honoured by the obedience and dishonoured by the wickedness of men; and if in this we endeavour to accomplish his will, and advance his honour, he receives these acts of love as real services done to himself. Here then is an effect of a sincere love towards God, namely a zeal to promote his glory and worship. The same effect may be considered in another light; and we may say,

5. That the love of God ever produces a desire to imitate and resemble him, as far as our nature permits, particularly in those perfections, for the sake of which we love him.

If we love any person with a sober and rational affection, it is for the sake of his good qualities; and, consequently, we love those good qualities, and would make them our own. If we love God because he is beneficent, merciful, long suffering, forgiving iniquities, not willing that any should perish, inviting all to eternal happiness, and offering them the means to obtain it, we shall in some degree possess the virtues which bear a resemblance to these divine perfections: and therefore the Scriptures with great reason frequently require this proof of our love to God, telling us that he who loves God loves mankind, and that he who hates his
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neighbour, and pretends to religious zeal and sublime devotion, is an hypocrite and a liar.

6. Lastly, Our love to God ought to be accompanied with an acknowledgment that we love him not so much as we ought, and with a desire to love him more. We think that we can never do enough for those whom we love, though perhaps we have done more for them than is consistent with our duty to ourselves and to the rest of mankind. With relation to God, such a temper is most reasonable, and the only compensation which we can make for all the coldness and carelessness which so often interrupts our duty towards him. The Gospel sets before us in its precepts a system of exact morality, and in the author of those precepts an example of virtue allayed with no imperfections. From these precepts, and from this example, we should form our conduct: but neither do we live the life of Christ, nor so keep his commandments as not to fail in many instances. The body pressing down the soul, the passions from within, and the objects from without, disturbing it, and taking it off from wiser employments, sully its very best performances with continual frailties and defects. God is not extreme to mark what is done

amiss: he is ready to pardon these weakneses; but then he requires of us that we be sensible how short we fall of our duty, and in how many things we offend, that we own ourselves sinners, and that we wish to make him more suitable returns. If we have any love for him, we shall at least confess ourselves not sufficiently grateful, and desire to be more diligent and useful servants, and endeavour as we daily draw nearer to our end, to draw nearer to him also, and hope that a time will come, when removed from the vanity and temptations of this world, and admitted into a better, we shall find every good disposition improved, and every bad one rooted out, and shall enjoy the happiness of never offending God any more.

In these things the love of God consists, and in these effects it shews itself where it is sincere; whence we may learn, that this duty is justly called the first and great commandment. Such indeed it is, both on account of its immediate object, God himself, who is the first and greatest of all beings, and on account of the extensive influence which it has on our actions, since it is a principle from which not only a general, but a cheerful obedience to God's precepts will flow, and without which
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there can be no such thing as religious perseverance.

The love of God is often put in Scripture for the whole of our duty, for all goodness in general; and so are some other single acts of religion.

The love of God, where it is used in a more fixed and restrained sense, signifies that part only of our duty which relates to God, a grateful sense of his goodness, and such acts of devotion, faith, and reliance as arise from it; as in the place whence the text is taken, where we are told that to love God is the first and great commandment, and that the second is like unto it, namely, to love our neighbour as ourselves. If to love God were the whole duty of man, the love of our neighbour, would not be a second commandment like unto the first, but a part of the first, and comprehended in it.

The love of God is the first and great commandment, and yet a commandment liable to be misrepresented and misunderstood; for love is an affection or passion; and it is not usual for men to have very accurate notions of the passions, and to know exactly what they are, and in what they consist; as any person may

soon find upon making the trial. The most familiar and intelligible way of explaining any passion to common capacities is to shew them the effects which attend it, and the actions which it produces. This method is used in the holy Scriptures, and that we may not mistake the nature and the extent of the duty of loving God, a rule is proposed to us by which we may know whether we practise it; and we are assured, that a careful endeavour to learn the will of God, and to act according to it, is a sufficient proof of our love.

The love of God differs so much from the love of sensible objects, and from our other passions, that it can hardly be called a passion in the same sense in which they are so called. It differs in this, that it is at first raised, and afterwards kept up by reason alone. It is therefore a religious habit and a virtue, which no other passion is, unless it hath God and morality, and religion for its objects. In this also it differs from them, that being both produced and preserved by reason, it is a sober and moderate affection, accompanied with no blind impetuosity, no restless uneasiness, no violent commotion of mind, like other passions, and as it riseth not to the same height with them, so

neither doth it sink as low at other times, but shews itself in an uniform and sedate love of righteousness, of every thing that God approves.

Some persons not duly considering this, sincerely desire to please God, and carefully endeavour to lead a good life, and yet sometimes are afraid that they have no love for God, because they experience not in themselves that warmth of affection to which others pretend, and which is expressed and required in some books of devotion. They may learn from the Scriptures that where there is obedience, there is always love, and that whosoever delights in holiness, and justice, and goodness, and mercy and truth, may reasonably conclude that his heart is right towards God.

Others looking upon the love of God as upon a mere passion, a disposition of mind producing devotion, and ending there, have excited in themselves a high zeal and affection for God, and a firm persuasion that they were his favourites; and having done this have thought themselves arrived to Christian perfection, whilst at the same time they have perhaps been under the dominion of evil habits, and addicted to wrath, malice, covetousness, uncharitableness,

tableness, censoriousness, injustice, pride, ambition, sensuality. This strange mixture of hypocrisy, vice, and enthusiasm, hath been common in all ages, and ever will be so. There are always those whose religion and devotion is, to use the words of St. Paul, sounding brass, or clamour and confidence; whilst true goodness is modest and unaffected, and teaches men to make less noise, to live more honestly. To preserve us from such delusions, Christ hath told us that we should either keep his commandments, or not pretend to love him, and that it signifies nothing to say to him Lord, Lord, and not to do what he requires.

Other love towards God than this the Scriptures know not; they never recommend that spiritual fever, those warm transports, and that bold familiarity which some zealots affect; nor that cold, refined, mysterious, and disinterested devotion, which another sort of fanatics require; for first, the love of God is sober reason, and not blind passion; reverence, and not presumption; secondly, it is gratitude, and we love him, because he first loved us.

III. I should now, in the third place, say something of the proper means to bring ourselves to practise this duty. It shall be in few words.

Since

Since the precept of loving God is called the first and great commandment, we may conclude that it requires a temper and a behaviour, which like all other excellent accomplishments, is not to be acquired without diligent application. A person cannot say to himself, I am resolved to love God, and immediately execute that resolution. It is not a sudden start of devotion, and warmth of affection, but a pious habit, and the result of many wise thoughts and many good actions; and the proper method to attain it may, I think, be traced and discovered by observing what are the causes which hinder men from loving God as they ought.

First, wrong notions of God's perfections, notions which detract from his Providence, from his wisdom, his knowledge, his justice, and his goodness. These must produce either an irreligious disregard, or a slavish and superstitious fear of him.

Secondly, habitual vices. We cannot love God, unless we believe that he loves us. The person who is enslaved to sin, and resolved not to deliver himself from that bondage, cannot think of God without horror and confusion,

and will find it impossible to consider him as his chief good.

Thirdly, as all evil habits have this bad effect upon us, so in particular, an immoderate love of the present world creates in us as great an indifference towards God. It turns every thought, every desire, every design another way, makes us incapable of taking any pleasure in religion, of having any taste for things which affect not the senses, or even of wishing for those spiritual rewards which God promiseth to the obedient,

If therefore we would love God we should acquaint ourselves with him, as far as our understanding will permit, and consider him as a Being in whom are all the perfections which are proper to excite the profoundest awe and respect and religious fear; and in whom this terrible majesty is so tempered and allayed with mercy and goodness, that he becomes the object of faith and hope, and humble confidence, and gratitude. We should keep ourselves, at least, from the dominion of sin, from repeated and presumptuous transgressions. If at any time we find that motives of gratitude prevail little upon us, we should have recourse to other motives, though

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though they be of an inferior and less noble kind, such as present interest, reputation, the fear of infamy, and of punishment in this life, and in the next. We should seriously and frequently consider what this world is through which we are passing, and what its envied and much-desired enjoyments, those especially which reason and religion condemn, and what we shall think of them in the hour when we bid them an eternal farewell. By these degrees we may hope to raise our affections to the Author of all good, and love him with our whole heart and soul.

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S E R M O N XV.

LUKE xii. 5.

I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

FEAR is a passion deeply implanted in our nature, which, like the rest of the passions, may be directed to proper objects, and moderated, and kept in decent order by reason ; but cannot be totally removed. It is to be found in all men, and it ariseth from a love of their own being and happiness, and a desire to preserve both. This makes every thing that they think will hurt them the object of their fear. Even they who by natural constitution and habit have what is called courage and resolution in an eminent manner, and boldly encounter dangers, yet still have fears of one sort
or

or other, as fear of disgrace, fear of censure, fear of sickness, fear of poverty, and the like. They have doubtless some fear of death ; but it is overcome by other fears, as well as by hopes.

Of all the passions this seems to be that by which the bulk of mankind is most influenced. By it human governments are manifestly upheld, and that which keeps societies in any tolerable order is chiefly fear of present punishment amongst the baser sort ; amongst the more ingenuous, fear of incurring the contempt or hatred of men, and the fear of being condemned by their own consciences, and of offending God.

By this method principally, by exciting their fear, God thought fit to govern the people of Israel, particularly when they came ignorant, rough, and unpolished out of the land of Ægypt, and from a state of abject slavery. The law is represented by the Apostles as a dispensation of rigour and severity, when compared with the Gospel. It was delivered from the midst of thunder and lightning, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and with all the awful solemnity proper to strike terror. Many offences both against the ceremonial and the moral law

law were to be punished with death : no atonement was to be made for several sins ; terrible temporal judgments were denounced, which God declared that he would inflict upon them in an extraordinary way, if they disobeyed him. Of these there are remarkable instances recorded throughout the history of that people, multitudes of whom were miraculously destroyed by fire, by pestilence, by the sword, by the opening of the earth, by sudden death, by serpents, by wild beasts, for their repeated rebellions and trespasses.

The Christian religion is indeed a milder and a more spiritual dispensation than the Law, as it hath none of the burdensome ceremonies enjoined by that covenant, as it annexes a general forgiveness of sins to repentance and future obedience, and as it threatens not, and inflicts not the same temporal distresses and calamities, in case of disobedience, and so treats men more like sons, than like slaves and hirelings. But then, to deter them from sin, it sets before them, what is more to be dreaded by a rational creature than temporal calamities, it sets before them divine indignation and wrath, in the world to come, upon those who obey not the Gospel ; it sets before them the terrors of the Lord, and the

the day when he will reward every one according to his works, and that Hell which shall be the portion of incorrigible offenders. These things are more clearly made known in the New Testament, than they were under the Law, and are there perpetually inculcated.

Our Lord knew what was in man, and what was the most proper manner of dealing with him, and of enforcing his duty upon him; and he hath judged it absolutely necessary to raise his fears as well as his hopes. There are therefore not only promises, but threatenings; not only rewards, but punishments propounded in the Gospel; and God, who is there represented as the God of mercies, and the Father of all consolation to his servants, is said to be a consuming fire to the wicked. If we are there commanded to love him with all our souls, we are also taught to fear him, and to fear him above all things. I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, Fear him.

The fear of God is plainly used in Scripture in two senses. It is often used in a large sense for all religion in general. By a way of speaking very frequent in the sacred writings, some
eminent

eminent part of our duty is put for the whole. So the fear of God, the love of God, the knowing of God, the remembrance of God, faith in God, reliance upon him, seeking him, and coming to him, are put for the whole of religion.

The fear of God is used also, in many places of Scripture, in a more restrained sense, and in its proper sense, for one single duty, for an habitual awe and dread of God; as in the text, where our Saviour exhorts us, never to let the fear of man deter us from our duty, and force us to sinful compliances, because all that men can do, at the worst, is only to kill the body, that is, to hasten a little a dissolution which would soon be at hand, and which nothing can prevent. Thus far the utmost of their impotent malice can reach, and no farther. But God can do this, he can kill the body; and what is more, he can raise and reunite it to the soul, and then cast both soul and body into hell. We ought therefore to subdue the slavish fear which we are too often disposed to entertain of mortal creatures, by opposing to it a stronger and a juster fear, a fear of that all-seeing and almighty Being, from whose presence we cannot fly, and from whose power even the grave cannot

cannot shelter us, and who can make death :
to us, not the end, but the beginning of woe.

I. We will now, first, consider on what the
fear of God, as it is a duty and a good disposi-
tion, is founded.

II. Secondly, we will give an account of the
different degrees of this religious fear.

III. Thirdly, we will conclude with a few
observations on the whole.

I. First, we will consider on what the fear of
God, as it is a duty and a good disposition, is
founded.

It is founded on a due sense of our own im-
perfections, and of the perfections of God.

To shew that our imperfections are nume-
rous, we need not go up to our own nativity,
and to those defects or spots which we bring
along with us into the world, defects which
have been often greatly exaggerated, and which,
if true, would be rather our misfortune than
our fault. Such as we are, we did not make
ourselves, we are God's creatures, and with all
our imperfections, we have it in our power, by
the grace of God, to perform as much as he
will require at our hands.

Nor again, in order to shew that our imper-
fections are numerous, and more than sufficient
to

to humble us, is it necessary that we should fetch proofs of it from the behaviour of profligate persons, of those who live in a deliberate and habitual disobedience to the laws of Nature and of God. We need only consider the condition of those, who in the estimation of the world pass for good people, and who seem to be in a middle state between exemplary holiness and gross wickedness. Supposing men, for the most part, to belong to this class, and taking a survey of such a state, we shall soon and easily discover a multitude of defects, more than sufficient to awaken in us a fear of our Creator.

We are surrounded with temptations to seduce us from our duty. Worldly pleasures, and worldly cares, and temporal interest, and bad example, and our own evil inclinations entice us to transgress; and various inconveniences threaten us, if we resolve upon all occasions to hold fast our integrity. In these trials of our virtue, sometimes we act the good part, and honourably repel the temptation, and sometimes we are overcome and brought in bondage. Then we are sorry and ashamed, and resolve to amend, and we enter upon better courses, and then we yield again to the sin that easily besets us. Thus, like unprofitable servants, we perform

form the work of our Lord by halves, and are undoing what we did before.

When we do ill, we are ready to find out some vain excuse or other to extenuate the fault, and to represent our condition as less dangerous than it is; and when we do well, we are disposed to entertain too favourable an opinion of ourselves, and to rely too much upon our own strength.

Though we do not slight and neglect religion, though we have a view to it in many of our actions, yet we do not so steadily and so principally seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness, as we know and verily believe we ought to do; but suffer the things relating to this life to have a greater share in our affections than is due to them. Hence ariseth a desire of more worldly prosperity than may be expedient for us, a great deal of misplaced care and idle industry, and too violent fears of outliving the perishing objects of our affections, or of leaving both them and this world.

Hence also ariseth levity and dissipation, a weak indulgence to pomp and shew, to amusements and diversions, which devour too much of our time and of our substance, both of which might be so much better employed.

And

And as in matters of practice we are thus deficient, so are we often not less in matters of belief, and entertain wrong notions relating to God, and to religion, which slide in and mix themselves with those notions that are true and well-grounded. And though, if we can answer for our sincerity and industry in our religious inquiries, we need not be anxious about our belief, and may rest assured that we shall not be condemned for errors which we could not avoid, yet in our searches after truth, if we can give them that name, we are apt to impose upon ourselves, and to desire that things should be as we would have them; we are easily misled by pride, and carelessness, and hastiness, and worldly interest, and other weaknesses and favourite propensities; we are positive in our own notions, and uncharitable towards those who cannot comply with them; our understanding becomes the dupe of our heart, our passions are our moral instructors, and thus we get wrong opinions and false judgments, which, springing from evil causes, are worse than bare mistakes, and must be ranked amongst our offences.

But supposing men to be better than we have described them, to be free from all habits of sin and dangerous errors, to be daily improving

in goodness, and to be able without presumption to hope that they are in the favour of God, still they have sufficient motives to a religious fear, not only on account of the various defects from which none is exempt, but because of a power natural to all men, which in one respect is a perfection, in another respect is an imperfection, a power of doing well or ill. As we are free beings, we can amend and return to our duty, and are very happy in having such a power; but then again, as we are free beings, the consequence is, that we can change for the worse, and end our course ill, after having begun it well. The consideration of this should teach us never to be too confident and secure, but wisely distrustful of ourselves; not to be high-minded, but to fear. The consideration of this made St. Paul watch carefully over himself, lest after all his great and successful labours in the Gospel, himself should lose that reward, which he hath instructed and assisted thousands to obtain. And for the sake and use of those who have made even the fairest progress in goodness, God hath recorded this remarkable decree in the holy Scriptures; When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doth according

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according to all the abominations that the wicked man doth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespasss that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. The divine Wisdom doth not make laws and denounce threats against faults which can never be committed, and therefore these words are sufficient to raise the fear even of a very good man, when he duly considers both them and himself. Thus is a religious fear of God founded, partly, as I have been shewing, upon a due sense of our own imperfections, and partly upon a due sense of God's perfections, as I shall proceed to shew.

There is no perfection in the divine nature, which is not a proper foundation, and may not suggest motives for this fear. God is most holy, and abhors iniquity as entirely opposite to his pure and undefiled nature. He is every where present, and from him nothing can be hid. He is allwise and cannot be deceived. He is the just governor of the world, and as such he cannot but observe the actions of men, and will certainly render to every one according to his works: and though he be good and merciful to all his creatures, yet he must be supposed so to

love them, as to love justice and righteousness also. He is almighty, and can punish the rebellious many ways, by turning them out of being, or by making that being a pain to them for as long a time as he sees proper. He is also supremely good; and though this of all his perfections may seem the least suited to make us dread him, yet whosoever judgeth so is much mistaken; for indeed there is not any one quality of the divine nature so adapted to strike us with an ingenuous fear, with the fear of a child towards a parent, as this, and of such efficacy to deter us from sin, and to make us avoid incurring his just displeasure. Sin against God, as he is almighty, is the excess of madness and folly; but as he is most kind and merciful, it is the basest ingratitude. The greater his goodness is, the greater is our guilt, if we be undutiful servants, and the greater will be our punishment, and that remorse and horror which St. John in so strong and eloquent a manner expresses in the Revelation, when he makes the Wicked say to the mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb. He says not, from the wrath of the Lion, though in the same book he calls Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; but, from the
wrath

wrath of the Lamb, from long despised patience, and much injured mercy.

II. We have considered on what the fear of God is founded: let us proceed, secondly, to shew the several degrees of this fear.

It ought to be observed that the fear of God differs in its degrees, according to our moral conduct, and the disposition of our mind. For instance:

A person is sensible that his practice is not at all suitable to his knowledge and judgment, that he deliberately and continually offends God, that he is not in his favour, that according to the doctrine of the Gospel he shall be condemned at the last day, unless he amend; and yet he goes on in his evil ways. One who is in this situation and disposition, and who seriously reflects upon it, cannot help fearing God. He fears him as his worst enemy; he fears him as a righteous and inflexible judge who will not spare the guilty. This fear is indeed well-grounded, and rational, and natural; yet producing no good effects, it hath no virtue in it, it is no act of religion. But if it deter him from sin, it is then to him the beginning of wisdom, and it becomes another kind of fear,

fear, and truly religious, as will appear from a second instance.

A wicked person becomes sensible of his dangerous state, resolves to deliver himself from it without delay, and begins a new course. He knows that this repentance, these good resolutions, and this change for the better, are things which God requires, which he approves, and which he hath promised to accept when they bring forth the fruits of a regular obedience. He hath therefore hopes of pardon, without which it is not possible for any one to amend: but these hopes are mixed with many and great fears lest he should relapse into his former vices, lest he should not accomplish all that is necessary for his salvation, lest he should be called out of this world before he has finished his important and difficult task. This is a religious fear, because it is mixed with hope, and honourable notions of God, and because it produces good actions.

There is, further, a religious fear, which bringing forth a regular obedience, and not being accompanied with so much dread and terror as that last mentioned, shews that the mind in which it is lodged is advanced to a higher degree of goodness. For instance:

A person

A person makes it his constant endeavour to live up to the laws of God ; his behaviour is such that he is able to apply to himself the gracious promises of the Gospel ; he has a well-grounded hope that his sins are forgiven, and that he is in the favour of God, and in a state of salvation ; yet fear, in a less degree, he still will have. The purity and holiness of God, which he ought to imitate as far as he is able, and the many frailties of which he is conscious, and the possibility of changing for the worse, will produce in him a fear lest he should not make improvement enough in goodness, and lest he ever should forfeit the favour of God. This sort of fear is not a restless tormenting passion, like that arising from guilt ; it is only a fear sufficient to produce caution and diligence, without destroying the peace of the mind. This seems to be a truly religious fear, such as accompanies a virtuous life.

There have been persons indeed, who by a long and patient continuance in well-doing, after many trials of their obedience, and many proofs of their perseverance, have acquired a full persuasion of God's favour for the future as well as for the present, have in a manner en-

joyed before-hand the blessings reserved for them in a better world, and have had no doubt and no fear of losing their reward. Such was the case of St. Paul, when he said to Timothy; I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day. Such a person is not, according to the strictest meaning, afraid of God, of whose love and favour he is secure; but he hath a profound reverence and veneration for him, which in a lower sense may be called the fear of God. Every rational creature, though even free from sin, must feel this kind of awe upon his mind, when he seriously considers himself and his Maker. The holy Angels feel it without question. Now reverence and veneration are nearly allied to fear, and the difference seems only to be this, that they are not necessarily attended with uneasiness, whilst all fear hath something of it.

The fear of God therefore is a disposition of mind, different in degree, according as our state is with relation to God and to religion.

There

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There is a fear that God is offended with us and will punish us; which is the fear of a wicked person.

There is a fear arising from a sense of our guilt, mixed and allayed with hopes that God will accept our amendment. This is the fear of a penitent sinner.

There is a fear lest we ever should forfeit the favour of God, and fall short of that future reward which at present we may reasonably expect. This is the fear of a good man, and it is capable of increase or of diminution, according to his behaviour.

There is an awe and reverence which a due sense of God's perfections and of the infinite distance between him and his creatures would excite in our minds, though we were secure of his favour, and had no fear of losing it. This is the happy state of those who have arrived as near to perfection as a good person can whilst he is on this side of heaven, and who are sensible that their course is nearly ended, and the time of their departure is at hand.

III. I conclude with a few observations on the foregoing doctrine.

From the things which have been said concerning the fear of God, as it is a duty and a

Christian virtue, it is easy to know what kind of fear that is, which is a weakness or a fault. As a religious fear of God arises from right notions, so a blind superstitious fear proceeds from wrong conceptions of him and of ourselves.

If we believe God's government over his subjects to be such as in any other being we should call arbitrary, founded upon mere will and pleasure and over-ruling power; if we fancy that he is provoked at such things as would offend no good man, and is to be pacified again by such homage and such services as no wise man would accept; that is, if we clothe him with our infirmities, and make him in some respects weaker than some of our own selves are, these unworthy apprehensions must raise in our minds an abject and servile dread of him, and produce a religion over-run with error and superstition.

It may be thought that the fear of God and the love of God are affections so different, that they cannot reign together over the same mind, that fear must be cast out by love, or love swallowed up in fear. It must indeed be acknowledged that we cannot greatly love and greatly fear the same person; but fear and love are so far from being inconsistent, that there is seldom
love

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love without fear in some degree and of some sort or other.

Thus if our love towards God be sincere and active, our sense of his goodness, and our desires of making suitable returns strong and lively, we must have some fear, if not of God, yet of ourselves, a fear lest we should not sufficiently testify our gratitude, nor perform all the acts of obedience of which we are capable. This is a religious fear, which may not improperly be called the fear of God, since he is the occasion, though not the immediate object of it, and since it produces good effects.

Or suppose we were fully assured of his favour and of future rewards, a blessing which God hath sometimes vouchsafed to his servants at the close of a well-spent life, fear would then indeed be cast out by love, but there would remain that veneration towards him, joined to a due sense of human imperfection, which may be called the fear of God.

Could we arrive to such a state, we should be happy indeed. However, happy are we, if that pious fear dwell in us, which rebuking us for our faults, and raising in us a due distrust of ourselves, and quickening our diligence,
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produces in us a care to serve God, and along with it peace of mind, and the hopes of a better state.

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S E R M O N XVI.

PROV. iii. 5, 6.

Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

AMONGST the helps which God hath given the children of men, to enable them to pass their days with ease and satisfaction and peace of mind, is that disposition of mind which we call hope, hope that if things go ill with them, they shall be altered for the better; and that if their present condition be tolerably good, it shall continue to be so. Without this disposition we should be very miserable, and with it we cannot be so; and we are all naturally inclined to admit and cherish it, unless some grievous calamity befalls us, or melancholy oppresses us and sinks our spirits. Now hope is ever accompanied with trust, reliance, and confidence on something, and it is
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either well or ill grounded, and it concerns us much that it rest upon a solid foundation, and that we build not our house upon the sand.

The Scriptures direct us to trust in God, and assure us, that all other reliance is foolish and insecure; which will easily appear by considering what there is besides him, on which we are apt to repose our trust.

The good things of this life, which are the objects of our hope, are usually length of days, and health, and easy circumstances, and reputation, and friends, and a mind capable of enjoying them. These things men hope to obtain and secure.

Therefore, first, they sometimes trust in a thing of which they have a confused notion, and which they call fortune or chance, which they hope will be always favourable to them. And yet as much evil as good may be expected from this imaginary Deity, allowed to be a blind Goddess even by her own votaries: so that this reliance is extremely absurd, and is not indeed so properly trust, as thoughtless stupidity, and inconsideration, from which the first untoward accident will awaken them.

Secondly, they trust in the favour of the world, and hope that at least, if they behave them-

themselves well, they shall be well used. But here they are liable to be often disappointed, through the vices and disorderly passions of others, and will probably experience the ill effects of envy, calumny, insolence, contempt, fraud and violence, whilst there are so many worthless, selfish, and dishonest persons to be found in all societies, and in all ranks and degrees of men.

Thirdly, they trust in their friends. But these friends may desert them, may want the will or the power to serve them, may be removed far from them, or may die before them. Indeed there are few immutable friendships amongst mutable men.

Fourthly, they trust in their own riches or power, that is, in possessions which may be lost, or which may give them no pleasure and satisfaction, and which cannot secure health, or reputation, or peace of mind, or esteem and love.

Fifthly, they trust in themselves, that is, in their own abilities, caution, forecast, prudence and diligence; and so far they are much in the right, that it is more reasonable to place a confidence in ourselves than in other men; for here we are sure at least of a friend who will
never

never fail and deceive us willingly. But man finds himself insufficient for his own happiness on all accounts, exposed to many evils from without and from within, and all the advantages which he possesses of body, of mind, and of fortunes, are of such a nature that he cannot ensure to himself the continuation of them till the morrow.

There remains then nothing in which we can reasonably trust, except the divine Providence; and here we shall find every thing that can be required for our satisfaction and security. God is perfectly good, and consummately wise, and supremely powerful, and constant and unchangeable, and everlasting, and hath frequently and expressly promised that he will take us under his protection, if we sincerely desire it, and seek it in a proper manner.

Concerning this duty of reliance, several observations may be made to excite us to it, and to direct us in the performance of it.

First, that our reliance may be rational, we should know what it is that God hath promised, and what we may expect from him; else we may be disappointed in our hopes.

From the Gospel we may learn, that no absolute promise is made to us of length of days,

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or health, or wealth, or friends, or reputation; and yet these are the common objects of men's desires. If so, it may be said, What is there left, as to this life, worthy to be an object of our wishes, or in any degree answering the great things which are delivered in Scripture concerning the advantages of religious trust, and the favour of God to those who confide in him? Yes, there is one thing left, which is worth all the rest, and that is contentment and peace of mind. What we may expect from our heavenly Father, is, that we shall probably receive a competency of the necessaries of life, and a heart capable of enjoying it; that we shall certainly obtain what upon the whole is most convenient for us, and conducive to our true happiness; that if disappointments, distresses and calamities of any kind befall us, we shall be endued with strength of mind to support them; and that if our measure of worldly blessings fall short in some respects, it shall be abundantly made up to us in another and a better way.

He therefore who will trust in God, must set his heart upon no particular present advantage, nor choose for himself, but leave that entirely to his heavenly Father, as to the only proper judge, and acquiesce in his sacred will. If he is satisfi-

fied, he hath his reward; for he who is contented cannot be unhappy.

Secondly, it is absolutely necessary that reliance be accompanied with obedience, with a serious and settled purpose, and with honest endeavours to do the things which are pleasing to God. For God hath established as it were a sort of intercourse of giving and receiving, of mutual good offices between himself and us; and as he declares that he is ever ready to bestow favours upon us, he expects something of a return, and represents himself as desiring something that we can accomplish. He hath assured us that in him we may find a defender and a benefactor; but it is upon this condition, that we behave ourselves gratefully and dutifully. On this point the Scriptures are clear and express. What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord. The Lord never faileth those that seek him. Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

And

And in the text, Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not to thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Thus God's protection and blessing are annexed to obedience: they who will not serve him must not presume to trust in him, and to cast their cares upon him.

Reliance on God is founded upon his goodness. But as he is good, he is also just and holy, and cannot delight in any wicked creature. Vice making us most unlike and opposite to God, cuts off all intercourse between him and us; and thus, though he continues unchangeably good and merciful, yet we without obedience can receive no benefit from his goodness and mercy.

Reliance upon God is founded on the relation between him and us, by which he is our Father, and we are his children: but he calls none his children, except those who serve him and endeavour to resemble him.

Reliance upon God is founded on his promises: but he hath made no promises to the disobedient; they are all conditional, and extended only to the good.

Reliance then is a duty which is not to be exercised, and cannot be exercised by the wicked.

wicked. Some indeed may be found amongst them, who, having an odd mixture of immorality and fanaticism, grossly impose upon themselves, rely upon faith without works, or upon works which God hath not required, and entertain wrong notions of his perfections and of his government, and think that he approves them, though they continue to neglect or violate his practical precepts. These persons may hope also that God will protect them and provide for them, though they have no imaginable cause for such expectations.

But most commonly they who will not serve God put no confidence in him. They account his commandments to be grievous and impracticable; they fear him perhaps, but they love him not. They therefore find no inclination to address themselves to him, and no hopes of being the objects of his care. As long as they continue disobedient to him, they seek out other friends and protectors; they trust in the world and in themselves, and endeavour to put him far from their thoughts.

On the contrary, obedience to God will naturally be accompanied with reliance on God, because a religious person has all possible encouragement to exercise it, and nothing to hinder

hinder or deter him from it. It is therefore expedient that we should examine our hearts, and see whether we have this relying disposition, since hope, as well as faith and charity, is required of us, and since the want of it is a proof that we are imperfect Christians at the best, and serve many masters, and have inconstant and inconsistent affections and inclinations. If we distrust God's providence, if we have doubts of his good will towards us, if we cannot bring ourselves to cast our cares upon him, certainly something is defective and faulty in us, and must be amended; our faith is cold and weak, and our conscience reproaches us for some wilful offences, and therefore we cannot trust in God.

But here ariseth a difficulty which it is necessary to clear up. If reliance be an indispensable duty, and yet at the same time impracticable without righteousness; if it be mere folly, rashness, and presumption, unless accompanied with obedience, those Christians who are duly sensible of their offences, and with all humility acknowledge themselves unworthy of any divine favours, may by this consideration be deterred from trusting in God, though they must condemn themselves for the omission;

whence anxiety and despondence will follow. It is therefore to be observed that God has removed all the severity of this doctrine by his merciful declarations in the Gospel to those who repent. From the moment in which we enter upon a new life, God is our Father and our protector, and with our reformation our reliance may reasonably begin.

Thirdly, reliance should be accompanied, as with an observance of God's commandments in general, so in particular, with supplications to him to bless us.

Our Saviour, who exhorts us to trust in God, commands us to recommend ourselves to his protection by first seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and particularly by asking his assistance in all our undertakings. He hath told us that if we seek we shall find, and that our heavenly Father is always ready to give to those who ask him. Be careful for nothing, says the Apostle, but in every thing, in all your affairs, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. This God requires of us, not as if he wanted to be taught by us what is proper for us, nor as if by much persuasion and intreaty he were to be influenced to bestow upon us

what else he is not disposed to grant, nor as if he stood in need of our homage, and received any benefit from it; but he hath appointed this method purely for our sake, and for our good, because prayer to him keeps up in our minds religious dispositions towards him, honourable thoughts of his power, wisdom, and goodness, and a sense of our perpetual dependence upon him, and natural inability to protect ourselves.

God, as he is immaterial and invisible, seems to be at an infinite distance from us: but by trusting in him at all times, and addressing ourselves to him upon all occasions, and by preserving this intercourse and conversation and communion with him, we have him ever present to us. If we neglect him, and put him as far from our thoughts as he is from our senses, he is to us as though he were not at all. Amongst men a long absence and continued silence and disregard produces a strangeness and coldness and indifference even between friends and relations. The same holds true between us and our heavenly Father. If we never approach him, so long as we have any thing else to occupy or amuse us, never till some pressing occasion drives us, and we know not which way to

turn ourselves, we shall approach with the diffidence of strangers, and the conscious shame of offenders, and shall find it impossible to trust in him, and to hope for a favourable reception.

Fourthly, reliance upon God should be accompanied with diligence and prudence in our worldly affairs.

If God hath bestowed upon us health and strength, and natural abilities, it is, that we should make use of them. By giving us the means to provide for ourselves, he hath in effect given us a provision; nor will he work miracles in favour of indiscretion or laziness. When our Saviour exhorts us to repose an entire confidence in God, Behold the fowls of the air, says he; they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. True it is that God provideth food for them; but they take the pains to seek it out, and to gather it up, and to provide for their little families, and by being examples to us of industry and activity in their way, teach us that Providence will do nothing for the slug-gard. As faith without works of goodness will not carry us to heaven, so faith without works of industry will not carry us through this world with

with any credit and satisfaction. We ought therefore to take as much honest and prudent care as if there were no Providence at all, and to rely upon Providence as if our care signified nothing at all.

It is evident that our Lord's promises of this kind to his disciples are not to be applied in the very same extent to all Christians in all ages. The office to which his Apostles were appointed was such as would usually engross their whole time and pains, and leave them no leisure to follow their former worldly occupations, or to enter into new ones. Therefore he discharged them from all care about their maintenance, and promised that God would supply all their wants. And indeed, as they were to be successful in their ministry, and to convert multitudes, and also to work beneficial miracles, they could never fail of an hospitable reception. Those converts who had received from them the word of God, and remission of sins, and the hope of everlasting life, some of whom also had been healed of their infirmities and diseases, could never be ungrateful to such benefactors, to such physicians of soul and body, as to permit them to want accommodations and necessaries. More than this was beneath their acceptance,
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and more than this Christ would not suffer them to take. Freely have ye received; freely give.

Fifthly, reliance excludes immoderate cares, and vain desires, and fretful discontent and dissatisfaction; for he who firmly believes that all is ordered for the best, and shall conduce to his happiness, cannot live in slavish subjection to these turbulent passions. If they have the dominion over him, it is a sign that his faith and his trust in God is weak and unstable. But here we must take care, whilst we recommend a trust which excludes a great and frequent irregularity of affections, not to insist upon an evenness of temper which is scarcely attainable, and rather to be wished than expected. If none can be said to trust in God, unless his mind be always serene and composed, and ruffled by no accidents, religious reliance will no where be found in such perfection. Our natural affections, such as hope, and fear, and joy, and sorrow, and desire, and love, and anger, and aversion, are harmless in a certain degree, which when they exceed, they become faulty, more or less. But they are so easily stretched or relaxed, and so soon out of tune, that to keep them constantly in due order is beyond human skill.

skill. Besides, in these affections constitution goes a great way some are secure and ever willing to hope, and some are diffident and apprehensive by nature. Melancholy also, and dejection of spirit, is often a distemper arising from bodily causes. We must not entertain so hard thoughts of our Creator and Governor, as to imagine that he will not make all proper allowances for human weakness. Of the two, it were more reasonable perhaps to suppose that he will account our sins as infirmities, than our infirmities as sins, since mercy is represented as God's favourite perfection, in the exercise of which he most delights. He will not cast us off, because our confidence in him is sometimes shaken and interrupted, if upon the whole, and in our serious judgment, we fix our hopes upon him, and commit ourselves, our ways and concerns to him.

But however, reliance, though it will not make a man insensible to trouble, and a stranger to any commotion of mind, yet will have a considerable effect towards regulating his affections and composing his heart, and producing an acquiescence to the will of God; it will set him free, at least, from those eager desires, and ambitious views, and restless apprehensions, and foolish

foolish troubles, and trifling disappointments, which are the portion of those who mind nothing besides the things of this world.

Lastly, though reliance be so advantageous to us, even for the present, that it ought rather to be considered as a privilege than a duty, yet it is a noble virtue, and a disposition of mind most agreeable to God.

God hath made singular promises in favour of it. We are told in Scripture that he careth for those, and will sustain those, who cast their cares upon him; that he will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon him; that such shall want nothing, nothing that a wise and good man would desire; whence it plainly appears how much he values this temper.

Reliance is thus acceptable to God, because a firm and rational reliance upon him is the consequence of a true love for him, and of a sincere endeavour to please him, and a sign that we have made no small progress in religion.

Reliance is in particular a proof that we are not covetous, or immoderately fond of the world; for as our Lord hath not promised us honours, riches, power, uninterrupted prosperity; as, on the contrary, he hath spoken slightly

ingly of them, and represented them as rather dangerous than desirable, the Christian who puts his whole trust in God will be satisfied with a small share of these things, and will esteem himself favoured by Providence, if he receives his daily bread for himself and for those who depend upon him.

Reliance upon God disposes and qualifies us to resist many temptations. If at any time our duty and our worldly interest are inconsistent; and something naturally dear or useful to us is to be quitted for the sake of God, a trust in him, and a confidence that he will make up the loss to us in another way, will enable us to choose the better part; and without this persuasion it is not at all probable that we shall give him this proof of our obedience.

Reliance upon God is acceptable to him, because it is the greatest honour that we can pay to him. By it we shew the belief of his wisdom, knowledge, power, veracity, equity, and goodness, and a belief which is not a barren speculation, but hath a proper influence upon our heart and our actions. It is a persuasion that God will protect us through the whole course of our lives, and give us what is expedient for us, though the inconstant state of
worldly

worldly things, and the many dangers which surround us here below, conspire and endeavour to raise in us fears and doubts and distrust. It is a persuasion that the state in which we are placed is the most proper for us, en, if we were to consult only our senses and passions, they would tell us that it is attended with many inconveniences.

Reliance upon God, where it is in an eminent degree, raises the soul, in a manner, above itself, and gives it in some sort a resemblance of the invariable nature of its great Author.

The majesty of God shines forth in his unchangeableness, which so gloriously distinguishes him from the creation. The world at first arose out of darkness and disorder; but before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth was made, he is God from everlasting. The creation undergoes perpetual changes through the revolutions of years; but the throne of God is fixed above time and the world, whence unalterable and the same he beholds the successive variety of things. Heaven and earth must be dissolved, and pass away, and put on a new form; but God is always what he is; infinite perfection alters not.

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Some sort of resemblance of this divine perfection may be discovered in the person who trusts in God, such a resemblance as can be between the Creator and the creature.

He is in a world where nothing is certain besides uncertainty, and nothing constant besides inconstancy; but he views these disorders as one not greatly concerned in them: his circumstances change, and his mind remains the same, stayed upon God, and strengthened against all events.

The Scripture calls God, The rock of ages, alluding to his unchangeable nature. Much the same expression is used in it concerning those who rely upon God; They who put their trust in the Lord shall be even as the mount Sion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever.

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S E R M O N XVII.

ROM. xii. 12.

Rejoicing in hope.—

THE joy of which the Apostle here speaks, is that serious, and pure, and spiritual joy, which the hope of an happy eternity produces in the soul of the true servants of God and of Christ. It is therefore to be feared that to discourse upon it is to treat of an inward feeling which experience hath not sufficiently taught us. And in matters of sentiment or perception, if the Heart is not our instructor, discourse will hardly perform that office. Words are sounds which strike the ear: but the soul is not touched with a representation of dispositions which it never felt.

Yet this consideration should not dissuade and discourage us from attempting to recommend the same temper which St. Paul recommended to the Christians to whom he addressed himself.

If he thought it needful to require it, we are obliged to follow his method, and to insist upon every virtue, every accomplishment, that constitutes the true character of a Believer. Nor ought we to despair of success; for they who have not yet felt that fulness of joy which arises from hope, are able to feel the absence and the want of it; and this may incite them to endeavour to acquire it; and such endeavours, properly pursued, will at length produce it.

Indeed it seems strange and unaccountable that persons professing themselves Christians should not on some occasions have cast one thought towards heaven, and, by the assistance of faith, have contemplated upon the good things which God hath prepared for those who serve him. Will they stay till Death comes to call them hence, and then lift up those eyes which are ready to be closed, and raise those desires which were never felt before, towards that better world to which hope should daily direct the soul, as to its supreme good and ultimate view? Instead of deferring such thoughts till they are neither fit for them, nor for any thing else, they should fix their views upon that state of peace and rest, even whilst it is, or seems to be afar off, and in the expectation of it antici-

pate those pleasures which both content and purify the soul, being spiritual like her: which alone can sweeten all the bitterness of life, and be equal to those desires that nothing less than immortality can perfectly satisfy.

To this happy state St. Paul invites us, when he exhorts us to rejoice in hope; that is; Let the hope of immortality dwell in your minds, and produce in you a pure and a constant joy.

But that this hope may be acquired and preserved, these things are absolutely requisite; first, to meditate often upon immortality, so as never to lose sight of it for a considerable time; secondly, to assure ourselves of its truth and certainty, by the assistance of Reason, and of Revelation; thirdly, to secure to ourselves the possession of it in due time, by a behaviour conformable to the precepts of the Gospel. For if we never contemplate upon this immortality, it can have no effect upon our mind; if we are not fully convinced of its certainty, it can afford no true and stable pleasure and joy, but will make as feeble an impression upon us, as our roving imaginations, or waking dreams; and if we cannot have some expectation of possessing it, it must be, when it is called to mind, a source rather of fear and anxiety, than of complacency

and satisfaction. So then, he who would rejoice in hope, in the hope of immortality, must think of it; must believe it; and must expect it. These are three qualifications and conditions, which we will now take into consideration; and, to use the words of St. Paul, may the God of hope fill us with joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost!

I. The first occupation and duty of a Christian is, to think frequently of immortality. Many inducements there are to incline all persons to look forward, and to anticipate future events of the favourable kind, unless such evils as they know to be incurable, leave no room for expectation. They who are disappointed, unsuccessful, and uneasy, and who feel nothing agreeable to their wishes in their present state, often seek resources of consolation in the favourable changes which time may bring forth. They fix upon that distant prospect; they reckon upon better days to come, and they please themselves with expectations, which perhaps they may never see accomplished. They have examples before their eyes, of others who have been first depressed and then exalted; and why should not the same thing happen to them?

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One may easily forgive them these pleasing dreams, if they keep up the spirits from despondence and despair, if they soothe and calm the melancholy passions, if they have nothing in them that wounds the innocence, nothing of the criminal kind; although, in truth, their felicity is a sort of illusion, and their acquisitions are phantoms, which the busy imagination can make and unmake with equal facility.

In general, and for the most part, it is adversity which seizes upon the future, as prosperity dwells upon the present. The Scripture informs us, that holy persons of old turned their thoughts towards heaven the most assiduously in the time of distress; that they lived and died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and desired a better and an heavenly country, and chose rather to suffer affliction, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The Psalmist, after having prayed to God to hear his cries, and to answer his supplications, after having reflected upon the prosperity of evil doers, to whom God seemed to have given

up all the good things of this world for their lot and portion, comforts himself with the thoughts either of another and a better life, or of seeing better days in this life; for his words will bear either sense. As for me, says he, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likenesses. In another Psalm, after having pathetically deplored his banishment, and his absence from the House of God, he hath recourse to faith and hope, as to his only refuge; Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. In the person of Job, we have an example of faith and virtue tried to the uttermost, and coming off victorious. This holy man is persecuted in his fortunes, in his family, in his body, forsaken of the world, forsaken of his friends, and in all appearance forsaken of his God. He calls to his assistance that hope which conscious innocence, and true faith, and sincere piety can never entirely lose. If my calamities follow one another, says he, like the waves of the troubled sea; if my children die before me, if my friends desert me, yet
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I have a Deliverer who can neither die nor change. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that these eyes shall behold him.

Thus it is; Calamities naturally incline a religious mind to seek in the Future, those consolations which the Present refuses, and to admit and cherish the hope of immortality. It is too often observable, that persons who enjoy a large portion of health and prosperity, have less inclination, because they seem to themselves to have less occasion to employ their thoughts in this serious way. Their advantageous situation engrosses their whole attention. Dissipation and diversions are enemies to sober consideration, and there is an irreligious, as well as a religious way of taking no thought for the morrow. But yet even these persons, if they have, I will not say, some degree of faith, but some share of common sense, some sparks of natural reason sufficient to distinguish them from the brutes, some kind of forecast and reflection, cannot be quite insensible of their precarious state. The well-known instability of worldly possessions, and particularly of health, which as to the present life is all in all, should discourage them from trusting in an happiness which is neither solid nor certain, and

incline them to use the means which may secure to them that life which can never fail. Without this religious wisdom, they are every moment exposed to see every object of their pursuit and their affection disappear and forsake them.

For this reason, our Lord in the Gospel proposes to our consideration the parable of a rich and worldly-minded man. And yet if by a parable we understand a mere fiction, it is scarcely a parable; it is rather a true story, which is exemplified every day. This man, finding himself possessor of great wealth, and of health to make use of it, proposes to enjoy it to the utmost, and says to his soul; Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. He is not one of those who make no other use of their possessions than, as Solomon says, to behold them with their eyes; who will neither bestow them upon others, nor upon themselves. His folly is not of that kind; and yet a folly it is; and his Maker says to him; Thou fool; thou hast goods, as thou sayest, for many years; but thou hast not life for many years: he who gave thee thy soul, will this night require it of thee. So is he who layeth up treasure for himself,

self, and is not rich towards God. He alone can say to his soul, Thou hast goods laid up for many years, who is able to rejoice in hope, in the hope of immortality.

And indeed, Death, which is always certain, is another reason to determine us to think of our immortality. The days of our life are known to Him, who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names, who foreseeth all that shall befall each of us, and all that the revolutions of time shall bring forth. But having made us free and rational agents, he hath in some measure put it in our own power to lengthen our days by temperance and prudence, or to shorten them by folly and debauchery. In wisdom and in kindness to us, he hideth from us that fatal and formidable moment which shall decide our eternal lot. But we know, concerning the period of life, all that we ought to know, that death is inevitable; and we are ignorant of what we ought to be ignorant, of that day and that hour; that under this uncertainty we may pass through life with more tranquillity, and conduct it with the more liberty and discretion, and neither neglect the care of our body, nor our worldly affairs; and that under the certainty of a dissolution, we
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may attend to the consequences of it, and pay a just regard to our spiritual concerns. And as Joseph, the wise Governor of Egypt, in the years of plenty, laid up in store a provision for the years of famine; so man, who is born to die and to rise again, should ponder upon that great change which will befall him by a law which cannot be broken, and by a power which cannot be resisted. He that hath a due sense of these things, will not suffer a morning or an evening to pass over his head without a thought of his latter-end, which for wise reasons is hidden from his eyes; and for reasons no less wise, should be ever present to his mind.

This, to the careless and the inconsiderate, will seem strange advice. Such thoughts as these, they will say, are the suggestions of mere spleen and melancholy, or will be the sure producers of it. It would cast men into continual despondence and heaviness of heart. To think of death daily, what is it but to die daily? And since we must die once, and only once, why should we choose rather to die a thousand times? Be it so. They who do not like to think of death, let them think of immortality, which will answer all religious purposes as well. Let them consider that a time is approaching when death shall

shall be swallowed up in victory. By performing their duty, they may hope for that time, and in that hope the servants of God may rejoice.

To anticipate future events of the agreeable kind, is one of those dispositions which are found in active and lively minds. Such for example is the love of honour, fame, respect, reputation, and glory, observable in persons of a liberal and ingenuous spirit, which is a sort of self-love. Rigid and morose moralists have treated it as mere weakness and folly; but if it deserves no commendation, it deserves no reproof, whilst it is regulated by reason, because it tends to the advantage of society, it serves to many useful purposes; it excites to many profitable actions, and it is justified by the word of God, which propounds it as one of the rewards of well-doing.

A person who is smitten with this passion, is pleased with the thought that his abilities, and his achievements of the learned, or the ingenious, or the political, or the military, or the benevolent and charitable kind, shall secure to him ages to come, and perpetuate his name and his memory. In imagination he possesses a renown which as yet exists not, and he hears the applause which grateful posterity will bestow upon him. This certainly is a pleasure, though
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none of the most valuable. How much more satisfaction must it give to a servant of Christ to meditate upon the glorious immortality, not of his name, but of his soul; upon the approbation, not of mortal men, but of righteous Spirits, of holy Angels, of his Redeemer and Judge; and by faith to take possession of those treasures, which neither rust nor moth can consume, nor envious and dishonest men can steal away?

II. Hope that is seen, is not hope, says St. Paul. It is true, because hope looks forward, and the present is no part of its object: when possession comes, hope ceases. But hope of things not expected or believed, is a contradiction; for doubt and distrust exclude hope. Therefore the second duty of a Christian, who is to rejoice in hope, is to be well assured of the reality of a future state. Here Faith is to be called in, and to perform her part; and the grace of God must co-operate with her, even that influence of his holy Spirit, which he will not refuse to those who request it of him, and seek not frivolous pretences to give way to distrust or unbelief.

The immortality of the soul is a truth of which there are many proofs, proofs felt and acknowledged

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acknowledged by the wiser Pagans, against which no arguments of equal weight can ever be produced.

There are in the Universe two sorts of substances, matter and spirit; and we plainly perceive two sorts of qualities or attributes belonging to the one and the other, which cannot meet together in the same substance. None besides Atheists will deny that God is a pure spirit distinct from matter; and since it must be owned that there is such a thing as spirit, we have no reason to suspect that the human soul is not of that kind and order of beings, as all her operations shew, such as life, and thought, and free agency; operations which cannot belong to bodily substance, which has no activity, unity, and simplicity, but is for ever divisible into smaller parts.

The moral proofs of a future state are still plainer and stronger. If there be a Supreme Being, the Maker and Governor of the world, man is a creature accountable to his Creator; neither his vices nor his virtues can be overlooked by the Almighty, but will receive a suitable retribution.

Thus Reason, even without the assistance of Revelation, obliges us to follow the eternal rules
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of Morality : for if it be barely possible that the soul is immortal, if there be no demonstration of the contrary, as most assuredly there is not, man ought not to expose himself to future remorse and misery of which he can see no end, for the sake of pleasures, falsely so called, in the possession of which human happiness can never consist; and to renounce sobriety, justice, and charity, which are real benefits, and give a solid and durable satisfaction.

These dictates and deductions of Reason are fully confirmed by the surer testimony of Revelation, which clearly establishes the doctrine of everlasting life, if we can unfeignedly assent to her authority. Here then we are to request, in the words of St. Paul, that God the Father of glory would give us the spirit of wisdom, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling. We are to join in that petition of the Disciples to their Master; Lord, increase our faith. The desires of too many are directed another way, and would willingly express themselves thus; Lord, increase our fortunes, give us the favour of the world, and new acquisitions. But the Lord hath expressly declared that the life of man consisteth not in the
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abundance of the things that he possesseth ; and experience fully confirms his declaration. Both the religious and the irreligious can bear testimony to its truth.

Believing then the Scriptures to be the word of God, we should carefully meditate upon them, and set before our eyes the behaviour of our Lord and of his Disciples as examples to follow.

III. For, lastly, if we hope to possess that immortality which Christ promises, we must perform what Christ requires ; which comprehends faith and works, belief and practice.

As to points of belief, strange have been the notions which Christians in process of time have adopted concerning them. A love of disputing, of deciding, and of domineering, begat religious controversies, and religious controversies begat new terms of Christian communion ; many obscure, or unintelligible, or false and corrupt doctrines were imposed upon the conscience, and all hopes of salvation were made to depend upon them ; no vices and crimes were thought so certainly to exclude men from the kingdom of God, as the smallest deviations from this speculative religion, deviations which were branded with the opprobrious title of Heresies. It is
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the Church of Rome which hath carried this spiritual tyranny to the utmost excess.

This is not the faith of the Gospel, which is plain and simple, which hath for its object a God and Father, a Redeemer, a sanctifying Spirit, a Divine Law, a future state of rewards and corrections, a Saviour born, dying, rising again, ascending into heaven, and coming thence at the last day to judge mankind. These are essential Articles of belief; and to receive these with submission and sincerity, is what I call faith; and yet even this can hardly be called faith, unless it produces obedience. The faith which justifies and saves is ever represented in the Gospel as an active principle, regulating the behaviour of a Believer, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Eternal life is the gift of God in the Gospel; but it is given to those only who live, not according to the flesh, but to the spirit; and whosoever hath this hope purifieth himself, as God is pure; for without holiness no man shall see the Lord.

And now I propose to conclude with some necessary remarks upon a duty which is frequently recommended in the New Testament, and said to have been frequently practised by the Disciples and the first Christians, namely, to rejoice

rejoice in trials, temptations, distresses, afflictions, tribulations, and persecutions.

This precept hath ever been considered by the profane and the irreligious as absurd and extravagant, as requiring men to divest themselves of their own nature, and to have neither passions nor feelings. Even they, who are by no means to be ranked amongst the scoffers, find it difficult to give an unfeigned assent to it, and to hope to comply with it; and therefore are disposed to explain it away. And indeed there are not wanting objections which may be urged against it. For it may be said, that in the New Testament there are frequent exhortations to patience, contentment, and resignation in adversity. These dispositions seem to contain all that should be required of us, and all that we can do. Now these meek virtues may produce an even temper and a composure of mind, but nothing like joy or exultation, nothing of the cheerful kind. The example of our Saviour is also set before us for our imitation; and if we consider his behaviour under his sufferings, we see the most perfect resignation, but we see no rejoicing. Once it is recorded of him that he rejoiced, and that was when beholding the Disciples who accompanied him,

he considered the goodness of God towards men of low rank and condition, neglected and despised by the world, but honest and well-disposed persons, to whom were revealed the mysteries of the Gospel, and the way of salvation, whilst they were hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent in their own conceits. In that hour, says St. Luke, Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Here was joy; but it was not joy in tribulations.

Christians therefore may be inclined to think that the exhortations to rejoice in afflictions is one of those strong and figurative expressions which require great abatements, one of those sublimer and heroic duties, which are rather to be admired than practised, especially in these days, when the faith and the hope and the zeal of Christians is not so eminent as they were in the times of the infant Church, supported and animated by miraculous gifts, and extraordinary supplies of the holy Spirit.

Now I shall readily grant to these objectors all that can fairly be required, that to rejoice at and in temporal evils, is not within the

power of human nature. But the text, upon which I have discoursed, is the key to open to us the true sense of all such passages. Rejoice in hope, says the Apostle. So then strictly and properly speaking, it is not in tribulation that Christians can rejoice, but in the happy consequences and the profitable effects of such tribulation, in the reward which shall be bestowed upon such sufferers.

And if we examine the passages in the New Testament which recommend this joy and exultation under temporal evils, we shall find that they relate chiefly to the sufferings which men undergo, not as they are men, but as they are Christians, for the sake of a good conscience, of their religion, and of their Lord and Master. And in this case, strictly speaking, it is hope, or the expectation of a reward, that is the object of their joy. When you are afflicted for my sake, says Christ to his Disciples, Rejoice: not because you are afflicted, but because you are afflicted for my sake; for great is the reward that is laid up for you.

As to the various calamities to which we are obnoxious by the common course of things, patience and resignation are rather required of us than joy. Indeed there is room here also

for some degree of satisfaction, when we have cause to think that they are fatherly corrections tending to our amendment, and trials which, decently undergone, shall be rewarded in the kingdom of heaven.

The Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states the matter justly, when he says; No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.

Amongst the temporal evils to which we are exposed, is the loss of friends and near relations, that tax which most of us pay for dwelling here any considerable time. In these trials, sorrow will arise, and tears will flow. St. Paul sets this also in a true light, requiring of us no Stoical indifference and unconcern. He gives us leave to be sorrowful; and we could not help being so, whether he gave us leave or not. But he says; Sorrow not like the Pagans, like those who have no hope: for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

S E R M O N

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EPHES V. 20.

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God
and the Father, in the name of our Lord
Jesus Christ.*

WE are required in the Scriptures to address ourselves to God in prayer or supplication, and in thanksgiving. The duty of prayer was considered in a former discourse; the duty of thanksgiving shall be our present subject.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is unnecessary to prove that the words, always, and for all things, ought not to be interpreted too literally and rigorously, lest perhaps they should be extended to impossibilities: but it is very expedient to shew the full sense of them, and to correct the mean and narrow

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notions which many form to themselves concerning this duty.

The acknowledgment and the returns which we ought to make to God for the favours which we receive from him, are habitual gratitude, and actual thanksgiving; and he who is deficient in neither, may be truly said to give thanks to God always.

Habitual gratitude requires, in the first place, that we be acquainted with the benefits which our Creator hath conferred upon us; and as benefits increase in value by the dignity of the benefactor, by the unworthiness of the receiver, and by the easy terms upon which they are granted, we must have a competent knowledge not only of the good things which we possess, but of the perfections of God, of our own defects, and of our Christian duty.

Thus at first sight it appears that thankfulness to God is of a more extensive nature than careless and worldly-minded persons imagine, and that it requires several things, which perhaps never once entered into their thoughts. It requires a knowledge which is not to be attained unless by serious reflection, by examining ourselves, our abilities, and our imperfections, by meditating devoutly upon the works
of

of nature and of providence, by studying the holy Scriptures, by earnestly desiring and industriously endeavouring to understand the religion which we profess.

We are indeed surrounded with God's benefits; and some of them will force themselves sometimes upon the observation of the most indolent and inattentive: but the greater part of them will escape the notice of those who make no use of their reason and sagacity any other way than in providing for their temporal welfare.

To know all that God hath done for us, is not enough: it shews perhaps that we have a good understanding, not that we have a good mind. It is the first step towards thankfulness, and the foundation upon which it must be raised.

Therefore, secondly, habitual gratitude consists in having a due sense of all God's favours, and in esteeming them proportionably to their several degrees of value.

The blessings of which we partake must be so fixed in our memory, and so affect us with admiration and love, that upon all proper occasions we be disposed to return our praises and acknowledgments.

The blessings of God are all highly to be esteemed; but some are more excellent than others; those which relate to our souls are of greater importance than those which are extended only to our bodies, and to our worldly circumstances. Too many persons may be found, who are not altogether ungrateful, but very imperfectly and injudiciously grateful, to God, esteeming health, and strength, and plenty, and success, above the hopes of eternal life, and the means of obtaining it. They rejoice more that they are men than that they are Christians, and look upon God as their benefactor, rather because he gives them the sun, and the rain, and fruitful seasons, than because he hath given them an immortal soul, and sent his Son to redeem them, and offers his holy Spirit to sanctify them.

One bad consequence of this low way of thinking, is, that when they lose any of those things, upon which they have set their affections, and in which they make all their happiness to consist, they entertain injurious notions of God's wisdom and goodness, and account themselves unkindly overlooked, or cruelly used by Providence. Therefore, thirdly, habitual gratitude is accompanied with content-
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edness in our condition, though in many respects it may seem hard and inconvenient.

The grateful person hath often sedately and judiciously examined the gifts of God, and having a reasonable hope that he shall never lose those which are most valuable, he is not disturbed if a smaller proportion of those which are of an inferior nature be conferred upon him. If riches fall not to his share, or a strong constitution, or the favour of the world, he hath received understanding and immortality, he is a child of God, a member of the Church of Christ, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven. He knows therefore and he acknowledges that his Creator hath been most liberal and merciful to him. He believes that perfect goodness gives him every thing that is necessary, and withholds from him only those things which might be prejudicial to his true interest. The temporal advantages which he enjoys not, are often bestowed upon the most unworthy; therefore he concludes that their value is comparatively small. They have been abused by many to their destruction, therefore he accounts himself happy, that he is not exposed to those temptations. More health might have made him intemperate; more wealth might have made him insolent

insolent and debauched; more kindness from the world might have endeared the world too much to him. If he be infirm, he knows that the weakness of the body often conduceth to the health of the soul; if his possessions be small, he knows that wisdom and * peace love to dwell under homely roofs, and that Poverty is often the mother of industry and knowledge; if he be little esteemed by men, it is a motive to him to seek other and better friends, and to secure the favour of God, and of those good beings, with whom he hopes to dwell and to converse hereafter.

Fourthly, habitual gratitude consists in cheerfully receiving those temporal blessings which God offers to us, those things which are plainly contrived and intended for our use and benefit. An excessive fondness of the world is, as we before observed, not reconcileable with gratitude. There seems to be also another extreme, an extreme scarcely consistent with thankfulness, namely too great a contempt, or fear, or abhorrence of the world, and of those temporal conveniences which are serviceable to us in our passage through it. We are indeed exhorted not to love the world; but by the

* — non humiles domos

Fastidit.

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* Sc
xxxii.

world, which we must not love, is meant the corrupted world, with its follies, vanities, errors and vices; not the world which God created, and every part of which he pronounced to be good. The objects which surround us are made to serve us, to nourish and to refresh us; and our senses are fitted to receive agreeable impressions from them; and by these and other arguments drawn from the beautiful and useful frame of the universe, and of all its parts, the goodness and the wisdom of the Maker are proved. It is therefore a gloomy and a morose sort of religion, and a superstitious devotion, which suspects these favours of providence to be no better than snares to our virtue, and enemies to our salvation. We read of many persons, whose religious notions made them * fly the face of mankind, drove them from friends and relations and families to deserts and dens, where they passed their solitary days in silence and hunger, in want and cold and nakedness: this they accounted, and this they taught others to account the height of devotion, and the perfection of piety. Their intentions were probably good, but their judgment was weak:

* See a law made against some of them, in *Cod. L. x. Tit xxxi. 26.*

and

and their zeal seems to have been of that kind which stands in need of the Physician, more than of the Divine.

But this is an error to which we are generally little disposed, and there is more danger of an intemperate abuse, than of a scrupulous and superstitious rejection of the comforts and conveniencies of life; for which reason whatsoever is said against an injudicious, mistaken, and excessive self-denial, should be said with sober care and caution, so that nothing may express the least approbation of that affection for things below, which inflames our passions, and weakens our reason, and produces a cold indifference for things spiritual and eternal.

Fifthly; habitual gratitude towards all persons to whom we are obliged, requires a constant desire and endeavour of making a recompense, and of requiting one kindness with another. Such returns are due from us, not only to men, but to God himself. It is true indeed that we cannot be beneficial to God; we can remove no inconveniencies from him who is exposed to none, and we can add no happiness to him who possesseth all perfections. But God, by a most wonderful condescension, placeth us as it were almost upon the level with himself,

as to giving and receiving: he represents himself as honoured, served, pleased, and delighted with our thankfulness; he hath substituted our fellow-creatures in his room, to accept our beneficence, and he declares that what good soever is done to them, is also done to him, and that thereby he becomes our debtor. Therefore habitual gratitude to God will excite us to contribute all that lieth in our power towards the prosperity of all men, to promote the welfare of their souls and bodies by instruction, by reproof, by commendation and encouragement, by acts of consolation and of charity, and by setting a good example.

Lastly; habitual gratitude is a strong and lively persuasion that the utmost returns which we can make to God, fall infinitely short of his loving-kindness towards us. All that we can do is at the most to offer up to him what, strictly speaking, is his own. We can dedicate nothing to him and his service, unless our souls which he hath made and redeemed, our possessions which he gave us, and our good actions which without his assistance we could never have accomplished. Nothing is entirely our own, and produced without his concurrence, except our sins; and they indeed are too numerous,

merous, and fully our best performances. The consideration of them, and of the goodness and long-suffering of God, should excite in us a sorrow that we have not been more dutiful servants, and a confession of our own unworthiness. This is humility, which will always accompany true gratitude; and where this is wanting, no duty towards God can be duly discharged.

Such is the nature, and such are the effects of habitual gratitude, which is the most important and valuable part of thanksgiving, and without which all verbal acknowledgments are formal and insincere. These ought indeed to be joined, and these will be joined to gratitude; they are the natural offspring of a well-disposed heart, which must express its sense of benefits by praise and adoration of the great Cause from which they flow. It is therefore our duty to give thanks to God, and to give thanks to him always, according to the direction of the Apostle; by which is meant that we must do it upon all proper occasions, and that we must not suffer any considerable portion of our time to pass away not thus employed. We ought to praise him publicly in the congregation of the righteous, in the assemblies of our fellow Christians,

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Christians, in our own families also, and in our more private retirement. When we wake in the morning, our first thoughts are due to him who hath raised us from the death of sleep to a kind of new being, and sends us out to our accustomed occupations, who took care of us whilst we could do nothing for ourselves, and had resigned up our senses, and lay lost in silent forgetfulness. When the evening calls us to rest, the dangers which we have escaped, the business which we have finished, the experience which we have acquired, the improvement which we have made, require a return of acknowledgment and praise. When we receive our daily bread, we ought not to forget at whose charge we are maintained, and who it is that gives us a power to procure it, and to receive refreshment and pleasure from it.

The second part of the text directs us to give thanks to God for all things, that is, for all the good things which he bestows upon us. These we shall find to be very numerous and extensive, and to comprehend almost every thing that befalls us and relates to us, except our transgressions. That we may form to ourselves a clearer notion of them, it is best to divide them into several classes. The gifts of God then are those
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which we receive as we are men, or as we are Christians, or as we are members of society; after which may be considered those which belong more particularly to our own persons.

As we are men, we have received from God a rational and immortal soul made in his image, and having some bright characters of his divine nature impressed upon it, such as freedom, self-motion, power, activity; we receive dominion over the inferior creation, a capacity of discerning between good and evil, and of making a proper choice, a body wisely and wonderfully formed, in which the soul is lodged; senses and innumerable objects to exercise and entertain them, the earth to feed us, the light of heaven to shine upon us, a regular return of day and night, of seasons and years. These blessings of Providence are not to be overlooked because they are common, but deserve our grateful acknowledgments.

As Christians, we have received a clear discovery of our duty, and of a future state, a promise of divine assistance in time of need, through the whole course of our lives; of forgiveness upon our amendment, and of eternal happiness upon our perseverance, not in faultless obedience, but in sincere endeavours to
improve

improve in knowledge and virtue, and to perform the reasonable service which is required from us. The advantages of Christianity I have here contracted into few words, but they are such as no heart can duly conceive, no tongue can fully utter. The writers of the New Testament seem to labour for expressions, and to have found themselves unable to convey to us in proper language the sentiments of a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude, when they speak of the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Whosoever rightly understands, and duly considers this divine love, will in some degree be affected like them, will be sensible that he can be no good Christian who returns not frequent thanks to God that he is a Christian; and will wish that he were like one of those active Creatures, mentioned in the Revelation, who rest not day and night, and are occupied in giving glory and honour, and blessing and praise to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.

The benefits of which we are or may be partakers by the Gospel, are represented by the sacred writers as the best of God's gifts, the most inestimable blessings, and consequently as the principal objects of Christian gratitude:

and therefore, as our Saviour hath taught us, when we pray to God, to pray in his name; so the Apostle informs us, that when we return praise to God, we should likewise give thanks to him in the name of Jesus Christ.

To return thanks to God in the name of Christ, is in effect to declare our faith and confidence in Christ, as in our mediator and redeemer, our high priest and intercessor; it is to express our humility, and to own that we could reasonably expect no good but through him; it is to acknowledge that of all the favours which God confers upon us, those which we receive as Christians are the most to be esteemed, and should ever have the uppermost place in our thoughts.

As members of society, we have received the singular advantage of birth and education in a country, where Christianity is better taught, and better understood than in many other Christian nations; where the form of government, in the main, is mild and moderate; where there is, amongst the sober and the better sort, a spirit of charity, and a love and respect for things which are praiseworthy; and where, though it must be confessed that there is much folly, and much wickedness, (as in what

what nation is there not?) yet examples of piety, of probity, of prudence, of knowledge, and of liberality are not unfrequent. So that if we see many, whose errors and vices we ought to deplore and avoid, we see others, whose good qualities we ought to honour and imitate.

Hence ariseth a debt of gratitude both to God, and to our country. Gratitude is due to God, whose good providence hath caused us to receive our being, where, if we had the earth to choose out of, and were wise enough to know our own interest, we should desire to be placed, and who hath hitherto favourably protected and preserved this nation. Gratitude is due to our country, from which we receive so many advantages, and whose prosperity we ought with all our power to promote. We cannot more effectually contribute to its welfare, than by promoting virtue and religion, and by exerting our utmost endeavours to discourage and suppress vice in ourselves, and in all those over whom we have any influence and authority: for whatsoever some lewd and profane persons have pretended to the contrary, vice is no more beneficial to the body politic of the nation, than it is to the body of the sinner, but hath a

natural tendency and a fatal power to undermine and destroy the health and strength of the most flourishing kingdoms. Private vices, say these men, are public benefits. They might as well say, that if all the inhabitants had the plague, the nation would be healthy; and if they were all beggars, the nation would be rich.

Public and national advantages and blessings require public acknowledgments and thanksgivings. Such acts of devotion are highly proper, as they are acts of gratitude, and as they conduce to keep up a sense of our weakness and dependence, and right notions of God, as of the supreme Governor of the world. To allow God to be the Creator, but not the Ruler of all, and to ascribe events to Nature, to Chance, to Fate, to Fortune, and to human Power, this is worse than ignorance, it is irreligion. The Second Causes which produce health or sickness, plenty or poverty, peace or war, as the elements, earth, air, fire, and water, the friendship or the enmity of other nations with whom we have to do, the operation of spiritual agents, good or bad, who are invisible to us; these are all the servants, the ministers, and the instruments of the Most High, executing his will,
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and carrying on the plan of his eternal Providence. It is with strict truth, as well as with poetical elegance, that the Psalmist represents heaven and earth, sun and moon, fire and hail, snow and vapour, wind and storm, obeying his decrees, and fulfilling his word.

Prosperity and adversity proceed from him, and are connected with moral purposes; they are encouragements, or recompenses, or trials, or warnings, or corrections, or punishments, all intended for wise and good ends.

The advantages of which we partake, as men, as Christians, as members of society, remind us that we ought to give thanks to God, not only for all things, but for all men. We are interested in the welfare of mankind, more particularly in the prosperity of our fellow Christians, our countrymen, our friends and relations. We are indebted to society for most of the conveniences of life, and for the means of improving our understanding, and acquiring wisdom and virtue: therefore we are bound in gratitude to bless and praise God for the benefits which he imparts to others. Charity and humanity will also teach us to rejoice at the favours which any being receives from his bountiful Benefactor, and to

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join with all the good and grateful part of the creation in celebrating our common parent and protector.

The favours of providence, which in a more particular manner relate to our own persons, are best known to each of us, and it is the duty of every one to acquaint himself with them, and to return his praises for them, for the deliverances from danger which have been afforded to him, for the good offices which he hath received from others, for that portion of understanding, judgment, sagacity, memory, skill, knowledge, health, strength, and conveniences which he possesses.

I have now, I think, made general and particular mention of the things for which returns of gratitude are due to Almighty God, except adversity, concerning which a doubt may justly be made whether it be a proper cause of thanksgiving.

When we consider that the evils of life are sometimes very afflicting and grievous, and that thanksgiving implies in it joy and satisfaction, it seems hard to reconcile grief and pleasure, and to require of men that they should think those circumstances to be blessings, which human nature and innocent inclinations teach them

them to shun and to alter when it is in their power. In extreme calamities, a decent resignation, an humble patience, a calm and composed submission to the will of God, seems to be the utmost effort of Christian fortitude and faith. But resignation, patience and submission have in them no exultation and cheerfulness.

On the other hand, it is expressly affirmed in Scripture, that temporal and transitory evils often produce great and lasting advantages; that God chastens and corrects those in whom he most delights; that to such persons all things work together for good, and that virtue thus tried and exercised shall be recompensed with the highest honours in the kingdom of heaven; the consequence of which doctrines seems to be that adversity, as it is a help to reform and improve the soul, an indication of God's favour, and an earnest of future happiness, should be received by a Christian not only with submission, but with thanksgiving.

Thus much howsoever is undoubtedly true, that a good man in the lowest state will have continual reason to praise God for many in-

estimable benefits which no calamities can lessen; they cannot deprive him of an immortal soul, of the benefits of Christ's death, of the kind influences of the Holy Spirit, and of an inheritance in heaven.

A good man will always have reason to bless God, if not for his afflictions, yet for those gracious declarations which God hath made that he deals thus with his beloved children; that he will never forsake them, or suffer them to be tried beyond their strength, and that they shall soon enter into a state of uninterrupted peace.

He will have cause to be thankful, if not for his afflictions, yet for the good effects arising from them, and gratefully to consider that he is removed from temptations which have been the ruin of many in more flourishing circumstances; that he hath no violent affections for the vanities and follies of this world; that as his treasure is not here, his heart also is not here, and he is ready to depart when his Lord shall call him.

We are assured that all things shall work together for good to those who love and serve God. Such persons therefore, whatsoever their condition

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condition and their circumstances be, can never want causes of gratitude towards Him, who even out of trouble can produce peace, and whose very corrections are acts of kindness and mercy.

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S E R M O N XIX.

JOHN xxi. 21.

Peter saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

THIS chapter contains a very interesting account of some of the last words and actions of our Saviour upon earth, after his resurrection and before his ascension.

He had already, as St. John says, besides some other appearances to this or that person, shewed himself twice to the body of his disciples, and afterwards he shewed himself again to them, at the sea of Tiberias.

Seven of them, of whom St. Peter was one, went to catch fish in the evening, and tarried out
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all night. In the morning Jesus stood on the shore, and they knew him not. He asked them, Children, have ye any food? They answered him, No. He calls them children, and speaks with affection and authority, as a father and a master, giving them cause to suspect that he was no ordinary person, though unknown, and to make them the more ready to obey his orders. For he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not well able to draw it along for the multitude of fishes; and yet the net was not broken, when they brought it to shore.

Upon this, St. John said to the rest, This is the Lord. He had good reason to think so, both on account of the miraculous draught, and because Christ had wrought the very same miracle once * before in behalf of him, and of some of the disciples now present.

Peter therefore, more impatient than the rest to see his Master, immediately cast himself into the sea, to go to him; and the other disciples followed in the ship. When they came to shore, they found that Jesus had miraculously provided a dinner for them there, of fish

* Luke v. 1, &c.

and

and bread ; and he called them to him, and sat down to dinner with them.

That they should have toiled in vain during Christ's absence, and have had such wonderful success at his command, this was an intimation to them, that weak and insufficient as they were of themselves, yet when they should be appointed to be fishers of men, they with Christ's assistance should be most successful preachers of the Gospel.

And as it is probable that they betook themselves at this time to their old occupation of fishing, through mere poverty, and to supply their present want of necessaries, Christ by this miraculous draught enabled them to maintain themselves without farther labour, at Jerusalem, till the Holy Ghost should descend upon them, and fit them for their ministry.

Christ, after his resurrection, had shewed himself to Peter twice before this, and Peter knew that Christ had forgiven him his denial of him ; and indeed at the time when Christ foretold him his fall, he also foretold him his repentance and his future perseverance. Therefore Peter was not afraid of hastening into his presence and conversing familiarly with him.

But

But he had two rebukes to undergo still, as it appears from the sequel.

When they were at dinner, none of the disciples, says St. John, durst ask Christ, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. They durst not ask him, because they had sufficient evidence from his deeds, and from his words, and because they feared lest he should sharply rebuke them for their unbelief, if they expressed any doubt of it. Probably there was an alteration in his person and countenance, and he had a more majestic aspect now than before his death.

When they had dined, Christ addressed himself thus to Peter; Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? More than these; that is, say * some expositors, more than these nets, these fishing boats, and these worldly occupations. I think that can hardly be the meaning; it is too cold and flat, and Peter might love Jesus more than these things, and yet not love him much. More than these; that is, more than these my disciples who are here present. Christ's words may be thus interpreted and explained:

* Whitby.

Thou

Thou didst say to me, on the night when I was betrayed, Although all thy disciples should forsake thee, yet will I never forsake thee; I will live, and I will die with thee; which was in effect to pretend that thou didst love me more than they: and now thou hast hastened before them all to come through the sea to me. I ask thee therefore, Dost thou indeed love me more than these my disciples love me?

Peter answered, Lord thou knowest that I love thee. He would not presume to say, I love thee more than these; he remembered his own former weakness; but he affirmed that he did sincerely love Christ; who replied, Feed my lambs.

He asked him a second time, Lovest thou me? without adding the former words, more than these. Peter returned the same answer, and Christ replied again, Feed my sheep.

He repeated the same question a third time, Peter was grieved at the threefold repetition, which looked as if Christ distrusted his sincerity, or foresaw his falling from his duty once more; and he said fervently, Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee. And Christ again repeated, Feed my sheep.

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This was a rebuke for his threefold denial of his master, and Peter could not fail to understand it so. But though he was disquieted and afflicted at it, yet he saw plainly that it was not the angry upbraiding of an offended Master, who intended to take a final leave of his old servant, and to employ him no more; but that it was a most gentle and an oblique reprimand, mixed with much tenderness and kindness, and a sure indication that his fall was forgiven him, and that he was reinstated in full favour and trust, since Christ not only thus inquired into the sincerity of his love, but laid upon him a threefold command to feed his flock.

In the conduct of Christ, as it is represented to us in the Gospel, we cannot but observe his great condescension, compassion, and lenity towards penitent sinners. He never uses an angry or a harsh expression on such occasions, but declares both himself and his heavenly Father ever ready to give a kind reception to all such persons, when they return to their duty.

Amazingly absurd is the argument which the Church of Rome builds upon Christ's command to Peter to feed his flock, when they infer from it the Pope's unlimited dominion over the

the Christian world in spirituals and temporals, his supremacy, and his infallibility. St. Peter upon a certain occasion said to Christ, Lord here are two swords. Some Romish writers have inferred from these words, that the Pope hath two swords committed to him, or a temporal and a spiritual weapon, with which he can destroy both soul and body of those who refuse to acknowledge his dominion. Again, because a voice said to Peter in a vision, Arise, kill and eat, the same men have concluded that the Pope hath a right to extirpate and consume all that resist his pleasure, be they particular persons, or whole nations; be they private men, or kings and magistrates,

Such high powers and privileges the Pope, it seems, enjoys as Christ's Vicegerent, as Bishop of Rome, and as successor to St. Peter; to St. Peter, who neither had jurisdiction given him over the other Apostles, nor ever exercised such dominion, nor indeed ever was Bishop of Rome. These claims and interpretations of the word of God are so childish and so abominable, as scarcely to deserve a confutation; but the controversies between the Roman Church and the Protestant Churches have necessitated the latter to expose these and many other infamous de-

vices of the same stamp. Indeed when we consider the character and conduct of many of these Bishops of Rome, as it is represented by writers of their own communion, we find that they have acted just as if Christ had not said to them, Feed my sheep; but, Fleece my sheep, and devour my sheep; and we must of necessity account them the true vicegerents of him, who is called, The God of this world, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

Feed my sheep, says Christ to Peter. This is an office which was common to Peter with the other Apostles, and is an office of labour and diligence, and is also an office of dignity. In a spiritual sense it may be considered as a Princely office, for Princes of old were called Shepherds or Pastors of the People; such they are, or such they ought to be; and our Saviour takes this name, and calls himself the good Shepherd, by way of eminence, who not only feeds and protects his sheep, but lays down his life for the sheep.

The Apostles, as we find, had an expectation that their Master would erect a temporal kingdom, and that they under him should enjoy a share of temporal power and prosperity. But he frequently took occasion to inform them that

he had no such views and designs, that his kingdom was not of this world, and that they had no better usage to expect from wicked men than he himself had experienced. And now, upon this occasion, he proceeds to foretell to Peter how he should end his days, and what he should suffer from tyrannical persecutors for his Master's sake.

Verily, verily I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee where thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.

Christ took many occasions to confirm his prophetic office and character, by convincing his friends and his foes that future events were known to him; and he now told Peter what should befall him in this world, a prediction of which St. John, who recorded this conversation, lived to see the accomplishment.

Christ's words to Peter may be thus understood: Thou didst once promise that thou wouldst lay down thy life for my sake; and then thy courage failed thee. But what thou didst then declare, thou shalt perform hereafter. In

thy old days thou shalt be used by wicked men as I have been ; thou shalt be treated as a malefactor, be seized, and bound, and led away, and die my true disciple and faithful martyr.

This was to St. Peter a full assurance that he should never more desert his Master, and in that respect it must have been matter of support and consolation to him. To many of us Christians it is much to be feared that such a prediction of martyrdom would rather be matter of consternation and trouble ; and indeed such sufferings are always unacceptable to human nature, and our Saviour himself intimates as much when he says, Another shall carry thee whither thou wouldst not, that is, to be put to a violent death, which no man would choose, if he could avoid it with a safe conscience. But Peter, besides natural courage, of which he had a great share, had also the powerful aid of the Holy Spirit, and a full conviction of the truth of the Gospel, and a clear assurance of passing from death to life, and of dwelling for ever in heaven with his Lord and Master, who had himself triumphantly overcome death and the grave. This surely was sufficient to support him ; and it would be sufficient to support any person, and to make him willing

willing to leave this world, and to die in any manner, for such a cause, and with such a certain prospect of glory and immortality.

When Christ had spoken these things, he said to Peter, Follow me.

Follow me: these words are capable of two senses. Follow me, in the figurative sense, is, Walk in my steps and after my example, as my disciple, the preacher of my Gospel, the shepherd of my flock, and my faithful Martyr. Follow me, in the literal sense, means, Come along with me. In this sense Peter understood it; for Christ, when he spake thus, arose and left the company, and Peter supposed that his Master had something more to say to him in private. So he arose and followed him. Turning back he saw John, who, unwilling to be separated from Christ so soon, followed them both. Upon this his inquisitive and forward temper led him to ask Christ an improper question: Lord, said he, what shall this man do? That is: Thou hast told me what is to befall me in my old age: tell us what shall befall this my friend and fellow disciple. Jesus replied, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

Christ at different times had discoursed to his disciples about his coming again, and the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the end of the world, and the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, and said that he should come before that generation were passed away.

Therefore it seems at first, and for some time, to have been a prevalent opinion amongst his followers that the end of all things was at hand; and these sayings of Christ were not fully cleared up till after the destruction of Jerusalem, and then it appeared that Christ had spoken of two advents, the first and nearer at hand, to punish the Jewish nation, the second and more remote, to judge mankind.

Jesus said to Peter, concerning John, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus said not to him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come.

It was no wonder that the brethren concluded that John should not die, but live till his Master's coming. Yet, says St. John, Christ did not say of me that I should not die, but only, If I will that he tarry. That is very true;

true; and yet Christ's words had the appearance of a prediction that his beloved disciple should live till that time; and accordingly, it did so come to pass, and he survived the first of Christ's two advents, and the destruction of the Jews.

If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

Here St. John closes his narrative of this manifestation of Christ: he tells us not in what manner he departed from them, and what else he said to them at that time. It is certain that Christ before and after his resurrection said many things and did many things which the Evangelists have passed over in silence. Thus when Jesus, after he was risen, conversed with two of his disciples in their way to Emmaus, beginning at Moses and the Prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things belonging to himself; but his discourse upon this important and most interesting subject is not recorded.

If an extract were made of his words and actions from the four Gospels, and every thing omitted that is twice related in them, it would be contained in a very small volume. So likewise, as to his disciples, we know but little of

their ministry, and of the things which befell them, where they preached, and how they died, except what is related by St. Luke in the Acts, and he confines himself principally to the ministry of St. Paul.

The short memoirs of these transactions set many impostors to work, in early times, to forge Gospels, and Epistles, and Narratives of the history of Christ from his infancy to his death, and of the preaching and travels of the Apostles. But as the designs of these men for the most part were bad, so their abilities were no better, and their works never could obtain credit in the Christian world.

We should be very much pleased to have larger and fuller accounts of our Lord, and of his Apostles, and of the first establishment of Christianity. A desire of knowledge which exerts itself strongly in all studious persons, a curious and inquisitive temper, which under due bounds is by no means blameable, and a zeal for our religion and for every thing that relates to it, plead our excuse for suffering such a wish to arise in our minds. But we must not indulge it too far, and lament our ignorance of these things, lest we also fall under the just rebuke which our Saviour, in the text, gave to his

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his Apostle, What is that to thee? Follow thou me.

If we had lived in those times we should perhaps have been desirous to put many questions to our Lord and to his Apostles, of the learned and religious kind, which seem to us doubtful and difficult. And supposing we had done this, it is more than probable that our Lord would not have answered them; for we find him constantly refusing to resolve questions of no immediate concern to the inquirers. And, as to the Apostles, it is probable that they could not have answered them, and that their knowledge went no farther than it was necessary for the execution of their office and the work of their ministry. Sufficient it is for us, sufficient for all moral and religious purposes, that the holy Scriptures, by the divine providence, are preserved and transmitted down to us, and that they contain all that is absolutely needful for us, both as to faith, and as to practice. For as St. John tells us, Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through his name,

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The practical inference which the subject and the text suggest to us, is, that every one should principally attend to his own proper business, to his own plain duty, and not concern himself about things which do not concern him.

As to the present life, and to temporal affairs, every one knows that it is incumbent upon him to procure and to preserve the means conducing to his support, suitably to his rank in civil society, and enabling him to be useful to his family, and to the public, and to pass his days with credit and comfort. Men therefore are usually bred up to some profession, calling, and occupation, to some labour of body or mind. They have some proposed end in view, and they are taught to apply the methods which answer that purpose; and if they acquire the character of being skilful and honest in their occupation, they can hardly fail of success. But if they neglect their own profession, which is too often the case, if they meddle with branches of business which they understand not, if they employ themselves in things which concern them not, if they amuse themselves with fantastical projects, or with vain diversions, if they suffer their expences to outrun their income, in short, if they mind
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any thing and every thing except what they ought to mind, they bid fair to reap as they have sowed, and to bring disgrace and disasters upon themselves. To them therefore the words of the text are applicable, in the worldly sense, What are these things to thee? Follow thy own calling.

Act in character. This is a short and a good rule. He who acts in character is above contempt, though in a low station: he who acts out of character is despicable, though in a high station.

But this is not the principal meaning of the text, which relates properly to things spiritual, moral, and religious; and here our Saviour's admonition to Peter is applicable to us all; Follow thou me.

Besides the duties common to us all, as we are men, and as we are Christians, every one hath his own peculiar duty, according to his station, age, connections, capacity, faculties, abilities and opportunities.

Thus they who are subject to others must serve them with industry and fidelity, and obey their superiors, parents, masters, and teachers. They who have the care of others must direct, instruct and assist them. They who are eminent

nent in wealth and power must be eminent examples of the moral and the Christian graces, and be the patrons and guardians of industry, probity, erudition, and virtue. They who are distressed and afflicted must practise the humble and silent duties of patience and resignation to the will of God, which, though less shewy, are not less valuable in his sight than the active and resplendent virtues which adorn prosperity. They who have knowledge and learning must apply these excellent talents to the good of society and the glory of the Giver. They who are of low rank, and confined abilities, must know and practise those things of which no Christian can be ignorant, except by his own wilfulness, laziness, and negligence. Every one is capable of discerning and feeling that he ought to live soberly, righteously and piously, and prepare himself for the day in which God will judge mankind. It requires no strong parts, no lively imagination, no deep study to know this.

But we would fain know more than this. Man is curious and inquisitive, and desirous of novelty: the eye is never satisfied with seeing, says Solomon, nor the ear with hearing, nor the mind with seeking and discovering. This
desire,

desire, innocent enough in itself, and even commendable, yet must be directed by reason and confined to its proper bounds, else it insensibly becomes a bad habit. Curiosity ill applied is at least a waste of time, which might be so much better employed. When it is exercised in observing the conduct and inquiring into the character of others, it often grows pragmatistical, impertinent, and censorious, full of spite and malevolence towards them, magnifying their faults, depreciating their good qualities, repining at their success, and rejoicing at their disappointments.

As there is a needless and impertinent curiosity relating to persons, so there is with respect to doctrines of no importance to religion and morality. Whatsoever opinions concern the perfections and the government of God, and the worship due to him, and the social virtues, and have an influence and a tendency either to mend or to spoil the tempers of men, either to promote or to obstruct the practice of piety, these are objects of sober and serious inquiry, that we may reject every pernicious principle, and hold fast every sound doctrine. But as to mere speculations and subtle refinements, which amuse the imagination without improving the heart,

heart, the fewer of them enter into our religious system, so much the better. Yet these have perpetually been matter of eager contention and uncharitable animosity, and ecclesiastical history too fully confirms this melancholy observation. A fondness of overbearing others, and of forcing opinions upon them which yet can never be forced, a zeal for things not certain, or not useful, or even not intelligible, a false shame of departing from false notions once obstinately maintained, together with pride, ambition, and self-interest lurking at the bottom, these have produced those sects and parties, by which the Christian world hath been divided, and the Christian religion dishonoured.

Let us adhere to our Christian duty, as it is set forth in the Gospel, and bend all our endeavours to live suitably to it; and we shall experience that as our Lord's yoke is easy, and his burden is light, so his doctrine is pure, and his precepts are rational.

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